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LARGE SECONDARY SCHOOLS RESPOND TO STATE POLICY

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By Jody A. Ratigan  
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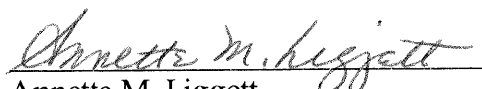
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By Jody A. Ratigan  
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An abstract of a Dissertation by  
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May 2003  
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It is the purpose of this study to understand what happened in the implementation of Iowa's 1998 education accountability law and to provide information to policymakers on how to improve their policy-making. This was one of seven FINE-supported studies to carry out this purpose.

The problem of this study was to describe and analyze the implementation procedures used by three large high schools in enacting the state accountability for student achievement policy and to provide recommendations from implementers for improved policy design.

Qualitative methodology is utilized based on the assumptions of naturalistic inquiry. Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted at the sites. The interviews were taped and transcribed. The data was coded and themes were developed using the process of constant comparison. Building improvement plans, annual progress reports, and school/district publications were collected and reviewed. As a member check, schools were provided site reports. The cross-site summary and discussion accounted for the patterns and themes from within and across the site reports.

Implementers perceived the intent of the law was to improve student achievement, appease the federal government, and be held accountable to the taxpayers. Though leaders in these schools had addressed student achievement years before the law, the curriculum directors became key figures in complying with the newly mandated reform, citing both strengths and weaknesses in what they had to do. From the implementer view, the law narrowed curriculum to what got tested and placed more emphasis on aligning classroom instruction, professional development, and data collection/analysis. Lack of time, insufficient buy-in, forced assessments, and workload were cited as barriers to the implementation process. Implementers recommended that policymakers pay attention to those who know the system, provide funding if they want deep reform, and champion policy flexibility for districts at different stages of reform.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Iowa Context

Nationally, education reform was a major state policy activity in the 1980s (Fuhrman, Clune, & Elmore, 1988) and has continued. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) cited the poor performance of American students. This report sparked many states to revise or implement state standards for student achievement. Americans are demanding evidence of mastery. The public wants every student to meet specific achievement standards to become a competent reader, writer, and problem solver (Stiggins, 2001a). According to Kaplan and Owings (2001), by the year 2000, 49 states had begun large-scale initiatives to raise public schools' standards and 48 states had testing programs designed to determine how well students were meeting standards. In addition, 19 states required students to pass an exam to earn a diploma and 26 states planned mandatory statewide tests for graduation by 2003. Elmore (2002) discussed the problems of stakes in performance-based accountability systems:

Performance-based accountability systems operate on the theory that measuring performance, when coupled with rewards and sanctions—one version of what I will call here, stakes—will cause schools and individuals who work in them—including students, teachers, and administrators—to work harder and perform at higher levels. (p. 1)

American education had traditionally been a responsibility entrusted to local teachers, school boards, parents, and community members. Labaree (2000, p. 29) stated that for most of our history, “the local school was the primary entity of educational governance. . . . An individual community built a school, hired a teacher, raised money through local taxes and fees, and implemented education on its own terms.” He continued, “This was the ultimate in local control.” Iowa remained a holdout for local control. However, the accountability push triggered Iowa state policymakers to pass an act requiring the state board of education to adopt rules relating to the incorporation of accountability for student achievement into the education standards and accreditation process (House File 2272, 1998). House File 2272 is also referred to as the Accountability for Student Learning Act (Richardson, 2003).

The ultimate aim of the educational reform was a substantial improvement in student achievement as measured by the gains on the Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED) and local district assessments. “Given the multiple forces that can influence student achievement, it is extraordinarily difficult to establish that a particular policy initiative is a contributing cause. . . of any increase or decrease in student achievement” (Malen, Croninger, Muncey, & Redmond-Jones, 2002, p. 126).

Historically, Iowa’s standardized test scores have gradually increased since the 1950s. Average ITED composite scores for Iowa students in grades 9-11 showed increases from 1985 through 1993. The scores were generally stable from 1993 through 1996, and have shown a slight decline over the last four years (Iowa Department of Education, 2002, p. 167). There were various reasons given for the decline, one being that Iowa experienced major demographic changes in the past 10 years. For example,

statewide from 1993-94 to 2001-02, the number of weighted English Language Learners (ELL) students increased 135.6%. “Weighted ELL students are K-12 public school students who generate additional funds for their school” (p. 57).

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century came to a close, Iowa became more racially/ethnically diverse. Immigrants from Bosnia and Mexico made up the largest segment of immigrants with nearly 700 immigrants from each country in 2000 (Iowa Department of Education, 2002, p. 10). The Hispanic population increased by 381.6% since 1985 going to 19,596 students in 2001-2002. The number of Asian American and African American students increased by more than 50% each during that same time period (p. 54).

Other demographic changes included the number of students eligible for free/reduced priced meals, the number of working parents, and the high school student drop-out rate. The percentage of Iowa Public school students eligible for free/reduced priced meals increased 3.7% since 1990 (Iowa Department of Education, 2002, p.29). Eighty-three percent of Iowa children now come from homes where both parents work (or from single-parent homes where that parent works). Nationwide, the figure is 66% (Rothstein, 2000, p. 1). Iowa’s grade 7-12 dropout rate in 2000-01 was 1.85% and was up .10% compared to the previous year (Iowa Department of Education, 2002, p. 217).

Perhaps not alone, but these demographics, many suppose, have contributed to a decline in how well Iowa students performed on standardized tests. But whatever the cause, the legislature was prompted to enact legislation that would reverse that trend and increase student achievement. Standards-based reforms create an easier system to track populations and they create a vehicle for accountability.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to address two issues: first, to inform the policymakers regarding the implementation of the comprehensive school improvement policy, and second, to add to the literature on policy implementation.

As McLaughlin (1987) put it a decade and a half ago, policymakers may not be able to mandate what matters, but policymakers can impact what local schools do. The primary audience for this research is, therefore, the policymaker who designs education policy intended to improve schools.

The “theory-in-use” (Argyris & Schon, 1974) now referred to as “theory-of-action” concept is embedded in program evaluation research. Proponents of the concept suggest it can help evaluate “the relationship between a program’s aims, activities, and outcomes” (Malen et al., 2002, p. 126). It is intended that through this research project, state policymakers will better understand the role that implementers play in raising student achievement as well as the role of policy design in determining how those implementers do their work. This study therefore provides policymakers with recommendations from those responsible for implementing the comprehensive school improvement plan. It was also the purpose of this study to add to the growing body of literature regarding policy implementation.

### Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is to describe and analyze the implementation procedures used by high schools in enacting the state accountability for student

achievement policy and to provide recommendations from implementers for improved policy design.

### Research Questions

1. What was happening in the schools/districts prior to House File 2272?
2. What were the implementers' perceptions of the intended purpose of House File 2272?
3. What impact did House File 2272 have on the schools/districts?
4. What barriers/challenges/problems presented themselves as a result of implementing House File 2272?
5. What recommendations do the implementers have for policymakers in designing policies to more effectively impact school improvement?

### Limitations

Due to my involvement with the informants as part of the inquiry process, I admit that values impacted the study. The participants' observations are subject to interpretation, so my biases and values need to be acknowledged (Creswell, 1998). While the individuals I interviewed were in the best possible position to know how the reform was actually unfolding in their schools, their perceptions are not necessarily representative of the broader school community. I cannot be fully confident that I got the "whole story." To protect the anonymity of the research sites and study participants, I describe the context largely through narrative description rather than numerical profiles (Malen et al., 2002).

The purpose of the study was to add insight into the policy implementation process and therefore schools were chosen for their ability to offer insight. They should

not be construed as representative of all of the state's large high schools. Rather, they represent a range of active districts translating policy into practice (Fuhrman et al., 1988).

### Research Note

This study was one of seven studies done at Drake University which explored the 1998 state education policy, House File 2272. These studies, initiated by a First in the Nation in Education (FINE) grant, were intended to inform policymakers of how their policy initiatives impact local teachers and administrators in a wide range of schools and school districts. All schools and districts had in two things in common: (a) they had to implement the policy; and (b) they all had a reputation for having planned for school improvement prior to the law having been passed. Taken together, it was hoped that these studies would provide insight into how the state might improve its policymaking capacity in education.

### Definition of Terms

Active schools: Those districts that “latched onto new state initiatives and went beyond them” (Odden, p. 10, 1991a); those districts that were “acting in advance” or schools that do not wait for policies to happen (Fuhrman et al., 1988).

House File 2272: Refers to the “Accountability for Student Learning Act” enacted in Iowa in 1998.

ITED: Iowa Test of Educational Development.

Local control: Major decisions regarding public schooling resides with the local school districts.



Policy implementation: Carrying out, giving practical effect, and ensuring actual fulfillment of the policy.

Standards-based-reform: Founded on the model of educational practice that specified high-standards curricula and instructional techniques for the classroom (Swanson & Stevenson, 2002).

Theory of action: Individuals take up premises that govern how someone will respond or behave under certain circumstances (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter contains a review of literature focusing on a variety of factors that impact policy implementation. The literature review includes the following topics: policy implementation, purpose of accountability systems, standards-based reform, active schools, professional development, barriers, and alignment.

#### Policy Implementation

Research on policy implementation has grown tremendously over the past 30 years. Lessons from the field indicate the implementers did not always do as told (McLaughlin, 1987) and that policymakers cannot mandate what matters. However, as Stone (2002) noted 15 years later, “Implementation is more likely to be successful with high political support” (p. xii).

According to McLaughlin (1987), policy success depends on two major factors: local capacity and will. Will, or the motivation to respond to a policy’s goals, is not as open to policy intervention though Fairman and Firestone (2001) noted that “State policies can influence district will to respond through the mobilization of stakes or sanctions, including both public comparisons and formal sanctions” (p. 128). On the other hand there is widespread agreement that “Capacity. . .is something that policy can address” (McLaughlin, p. 172). Fuhrman (2001) concluded that variation in implementation depended on how the policy was designed to support the capacity of local districts to respond (p. 268). Richard Elmore helped to clarify the issue in defining capacity this way:

When we talk about “capacity,” we’re basically talking about skill and knowledge. If you’re going to make the changes in student learning that accountability requires, you have to dramatically increase the skill and knowledge of teachers and principals. (Farrace, 2002, p. 40)

Elmore later identified the “principle of the reciprocity of accountability for capacity” (Farrace, 2002, p. 42). He explained that if it is the state that initiates the additional unit of performance requirement, then it is the state’s responsibility to provide the capacity to acquire the knowledge and skill to do that requirement. Similarly, Sirotnik (2002) argued the need to hold the political system accountable for “their” part in providing educational capacity, namely, in “expecting them to ‘walk their talk’ by providing the necessary resources” (p. 664).

The will or commitment of the implementer, as described by McLaughlin (1987), may reflect the implementer’s assessment of the value of the policy. What is finally delivered depends on the individual at the end of the line or the “street level bureaucrat” (McLaughlin, p. 174). Implementation of even the best-planned and supported initiatives still depends on the individuals that interpret and act on them. McLaughlin continued, “Change ultimately is a problem of the smallest unit. . . .Individuals responsible for carrying out a policy act not only from institutional incentives, but also from professional and personal motivation. . . .Motivated professionals. . .make every effort to do their job well” (p. 174). Lipsky (cited in Stone, 1985) noted, “While bureaucratic foot soldiers may be immune to various forms of command and control, there is little they themselves can accomplish with the aid of facilitating steps by their superiors or without support from the public” (p. 488). McDonnell showed “that policy implementation may be

difficult when a governmental initiative fundamentally challenges traditional notions of who governs schools” (cited in Odden, 1991a, p. 11).

The link between the policy and what happens in implementation has been the subject of research for over two decades. Fuhrman et al. (1988) described a reform model that involved mutual adaptations between districts and the state whereby each adjusted its goals to find a satisfactory accommodation. Elmore (1980) noted that if administrative feasibility is not discussed and accommodated in the policy “then the complexity of implementation will almost certainly overwhelm the intent of policy” (p. 3). Lagemann (2000) stated that to be adopted successfully, “A reform would inevitably be modified as it was translated into practice” (p. 227). As De Soto (2000) described, “The crucial issue is that the formal laws don’t coincide with how things really work” (p. 92). Policymakers were not well informed “about the effects of their endeavors; they made no attempt to learn systematically about how the reforms played out in schools and classrooms” (Cohen & Hill, 2001, p. 187).

Cohen and Hill (2001), in their decade of study of California reform efforts, noted the implementation link to policy in very practical terms. Reform, they asserted, is easier for the politicians than for the implementers. This was similar to Joseph Califano’s remark that it was easier for Moses to deliver the 10 Commandments than for the Priests and rabbis to implement them (as cited in Bok, 2001). First, it is important that implementers learn the rules of the law; they need to understand before they commit to the quality of implementation. Fuhrman et al. (1988) described that successful implementation would be enhanced if the reforms and goals were sufficiently clear and coherent. Even with a good understanding of what was required, mandated procedures

had to be blended in with ongoing operations which had developed around the local values and needs. “Local response may provide what reformers need, not what they want” (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 175). She stated that variability is desirable and “*local variability is the rule; uniformity is the exception* [italics in original] (1998, p. 72).” A RAND (2002) research brief indicated implementation tended to vary across sites, and the outcomes also varied. The report continued, “This variation in outcomes occurs largely because of the number of players and the number of factors that need to be in alignment to support fundamental change.” Elmore (1980) cautioned, “If variability enhances the likelihood of program effectiveness, it is good; if it does not, it is bad. The important issue, then, is when does variability support and when does it undermine successful program operations” (p. 13).

McLaughlin also found other local factors affecting implementation that had to do with size, inter- and intra-organizational relations, commitment of the organization as a whole, organizational capacity, and institutional complexity (1987, p. 172). Elmore (2002), too, identified several factors that could be expected to affect implementation that included buy-in, capacity, context set by the district, and context set by state policies. Elmore also noted that studies reporting high levels of implementation had designs that incorporated strong assistance from the design teams.

Fairman and Firestone (2001) suggested that size may increase a district’s capacity to respond as larger organizations have more specialists and are more efficient. They would argue that bigger is better (p. 132), though their research is limited in the number of schools and policies examined.

Swanson and Stevenson noted that for decades educational research has found that successful reform efforts often hinge on generating conducive attitudes among local stakeholders like teachers (2002, p. 15). Weatherly and Lipsky (cited in Swanson & Stevenson, 2002) stated, “The instructional effects observed for teacher knowledge of and receptivity towards standards-based practices further solidifies the image of teachers as the critical ‘street level bureaucrats’ for implementing educational change” (p. 17). Teacher commitment was critical for change to occur (Odden, 1991b, p. 307).

Elmore (2002) weighs in also on the importance of local stakeholders in that, “Accountability systems do not produce performance; they mobilize incentives, engagement, agency, and capacity that produces performance.” Scott (1998) stated that social plans must recognize the importance of local customs and practical knowledge in order to succeed. The practical knowledge was “what Greeks of the classical period called ‘*metis*’ [italics in original]. . . .*Metis* is better understood as the kind of knowledge that can be acquired only by long practice at similar but rarely identical tasks” (p. 177). Scott added, “An institution or social form that takes much of its shape from the *mētis* of the people engaged in it will thereby enhance their range of experience and skills. . . .The *mētis*-friendly institution both uses and renews a valuable public good” (p. 356). Scott concluded by stating that democracy was based on the assumption that the *mētis* of its citizens should continually modify the policies of the land (p. 357).

In accenting the importance of context in successful implementation, McDonnell and Elmore (1987) acknowledged this importance in understanding how policy variables each interact with the local situation. Fuhrman et al. (1988) also noted that local context had long been appreciated by researchers. Elmore (2002) went even further stating that,

“the best predictor of how a school would respond to state policy was its organizational culture when the policy became effective” (p. 19). In other words, nothing was more important in getting a policy instituted in a district than what had happened at the local level prior to anything happening at the state level.

To take advantage of various policy-to-implementation linkages, McDonnell (1991) stated that policymakers needed to consider a broader range of strategies beyond mandates and inducements. If professionalism was to be strengthened without sacrificing democratic control norms, then capacity-building instruments needed to be considered as part of any policy repertoire (McDonnell, p. 257). Recognizing existing capacity for developing long-term reform appeared “not only important but paramount” (Fuhrman et al., 1988, p. 216). Ownership was possible without teacher participation in the shaping of policy, so policy can lead, but as McDonnell referenced, the challenge to the lawmakers is to create a policy that builds on or develops capacity such that both the teaching profession and the public understand how the policy can be held accountable.

### Purpose of Accountability Systems

In reviewing the past decade of policy on education reform, Fuhrman (2001) reported that, “Accountability systems that dole out rewards and punishments based on student performance are becoming the central drivers of standards-based reform” (p. 9). The thinking behind accountability, Elmore (2002) suggested, was that rewards and sanctions would cause people to work harder and perform better.

More specifically, Massell (1998) added that, “A key assumption of the reform strategy employed by policymakers today is that performance information. . .will drive change. . .because it is embedded in a system of rewards and sanctions that will further

motivate teachers and schools to improve” (p. 32). As Elmore and Rothman noted, “The theory of action of the standards-based reform model suggests that, armed with data on how students perform against standards, schools will make the instructional changes needed to improve performance” (cited in Massell, 2001, p. 148).

In a more theoretical version, Baker and Linn (2002) stated, “The theory of action underlying the adoption of accountability systems derives from the adage ‘knowledge is power.’ It assumes that when people (or institutions) are given results of an endeavor, they will act to build on strengths and remedy. . .weaknesses” (p. 1). Goertz (2001) added her thoughts on the theory behind accountability in stating that, “Student performance is cumulative. . .and a system of collective responsibility will encourage school staff to work collaboratively.”

Accountability has thus become the central theory of action in the reform stable. The concept of theory of action was drawn on the work of Argyris and Schon (1974) who argued that individuals take up "theories of action," that govern how someone will respond or behave under certain circumstances (pp. 6-7). They stated that the theory that actually governs a person's actions is his “theory-in-use” (p. 7). People make distinction between "espoused theories" and "theories in use" to compare the official version of how the program operates with what really happens (Patton, 1990, p. 107).

Sirotnik (2002) offered a caution in terms of this theory in insisting that, “An accountability system must listen carefully to the people most involved in educational activities. . .and must seek to develop, cooperatively, viable plans of action” (p. 665). Cohen and Hill (2001) also noted that we should proceed with caution as, “the public deserves to know how efforts to change the schools affect teaching, learning, and



children's well-being" (p. 189). It was not that the theory would not work as much as it was that research was still not clear on how it would work.

### Standards-Based Reform

According to Furhman (2001), "Standards-based reform emerged in the late 1980s when "policymakers were still experiencing the despair about lagging American achievement" (p. 1). Odden (1991a) described that the policy focus shifted from single program initiatives to improving the overall educational system (p. 4). Odden stated, "States were saying that they expected the education system to educate all kids up to at least a proficiency level of performance" (cited in Farrace, 2003, p. 26). Labaree (2000) stated, "Everyone gains if a public school system produces competent citizens and productive workers" (p. 32). In addition, as Fuhrman et al. (1988) noted, the educational reforms "can be interpreted as natural impulses to ensure accountability for the ever larger state aid dollar" (p. 207).

The aim of standards-based reform, as described by Swanson and Stevenson (2002), was to "reach into individual classrooms, changing the nature of instruction with the ultimate goal of improving student learning" (p. 1). Cohen and Hill (2001) stated that to be effective, policy needed to change teacher practice. "Instructional interventions must change what teachers do in the classroom"(p. 145). Standards-based reform was founded on the model of educational practice that specified high-standards curricula and instructional techniques for the classroom (Swanson & Stevenson, 2002, p. 2). Clune (2001) described a theory of standards-based reform in that "standards-based reform leads to standards-based policy which leads to standards-based curriculum which leads to higher student achievement" (p. 15). He explained that the standards-based curriculum is

made up of the “content and pedagogy, the material actually conveyed. . .and the instructional methods by which it is taught” (p. 17). Marzano (2000) cautioned that the implications of standards-based curriculum are direct and important. He noted that state-level standards documents do not address the difference between informational knowledge and procedural knowledge. According to Marzano, “Declarative knowledge involves a different type of learning from procedural knowledge and therefore requires a different curriculum design” (p. 3).

Labaree (2000) described that Americans have resisted standards. He contended there were three factors that have made standards a hard sell: (a) local control of schools—“Don’t tell me what to do” (p. 29), (b) expanding educational opportunities—“Don’t get in my way” (p. 30), and (c) form over substance/Carnegie Units—“Don’t make me learn, I’m trying to graduate” (p. 31). However, Fuhrman et al. (1988, p. 208) found that there was not much resistance to many of the reforms in most places. Cohen and Hill (2001) found that some reform practices were implemented extensively, but “teachers made their own sense of the reforms” (p. 83). They continued by stating that teachers “exercised judgment about what to attend to, and how” (p. 85). As “policy brokers,” teachers were not educational clerks but “active players who judge and use policy, and make policy as they respond to others’ initiatives” (Cohen & Hill, p. 85). As Astuto and Clark (1986) found, individuals would be more likely to risk change “when there are shared expectations for success” (p. 65).

Odden (1991b, p. 306) noted that the support of the central office and site administrators was needed to implement changes. Successful schools, according to Odden, were characterized by having principals that had “a really good understanding of

effective educational strategies” (in Farrace, 2003, p. 28). However, Cohen and Hill stated there was a “moderately strong association between principal’s knowledge of reform and school’s overall effort to change” (2001, p. 167).

One of the criteria described by Mitchell (1986) to evaluate state-level policies addressed whether the policy recognized the need for and appropriately supported the organizational integrity of the schools. As Stone (2002) stated, “It would be helpful for a designer to stand in the shoes of the target and ask ‘How does this rule or law affect me?’” (p. 300). According to Mitchell, “There is good reason to believe that many schools have been disorganized rather than redirected by some recent policy initiatives” (1986). Schmoker (2000), joining Sirotnik and Cohen and Hill in issuing a caution on current theory, noted that there are imperfections in the standards movement. However, he insists, “given the chance, standards will fundamentally transform a system that has historically denied both teachers and students the opportunity to be the best that they can be” (p. 57).

According to Swanson and Stevenson (2002), “The development of statewide standardized testing programs. . . was part of a renewed effort to use information on student performance to inform decisions about graduation and promotion, and to devise systems of accountability at the school and district levels” (p. 3). Goertz (2001) stated, “Most states have adopted some form of performance based accountability. They differ in how they ask these questions: Who is held accountable? For what are they held accountable? How are they held accountable? And what are the consequences?” (p. 42). Goertz added, “Public reporting is the most basic form of accountability. Schools give an account of their programs and performance. The public can then use this information to

demand improvements in their schools” (p. 44). Baker and Linn (2002) added, “The press plays an important role in the interpretation of the results produced by accountability systems” (p. 23).

Swanson and Stevenson (2002) noted that legally binding authority over public schooling resides with the states and that each is free to “chart its own course for educational improvement” (p. 4). However, Cohen and Hill (2001) found that “Politically, the state government’s influence on local schools was modest, and its technical and professional capacity to encourage and support change was meager” (p. 13). Some states developed, as Goertz (2001) noted, “Accountability systems that emphasize local standards and local planning. States allow districts to establish criteria...but use strategic or district and school improvement plans to hold districts accountable for student performance.” Swanson and Stevenson (2002) found that Iowa displayed very low levels of standards activity (p. 11).

### Active Schools

Many school districts are viewed to be reactive to federal and state policy (Fuhrman et al., 1988), at least partially because they “are busily making their own policies, engaging in networks with and borrowing from other local districts. Such districts do not merely adapt to state policy, they orchestrate and amplify policies around local priorities” (p. 217). Fuhrman et al. found that states were increasing standards and testing, but so were the local districts. In other words, some local districts felt that the state mandates were an unnecessary layer of policy.

These active schools do not wait for state policies to happen, they make them happen (Fuhrman et al., 1988). As Hannaway and Kimball (2001) also found, the more

experience in reform, the better schools were doing in reform. Astuto and Clark (1986) stated that research has shown consistently “that organizations learn how to innovate by implementing innovations” (p. 60). Put another way, “Successful organizations learn more by doing more” (p. 61).

If an organization is to be effective at implementing reform, people in the organization must be able to access and use three basic commodities described by Kanter: information, resources, and support (cited in Astuto and Clark, 1986, p. 67). Information (data, technical knowledge, political intelligence, expertise), resources (funds, materials) and support (endorsement, backing, approval, legitimacy) were the organizational power tools. However, Stone (1985) mused, “Administrators are supposed to (a) show good results, (b) not neglect any goal, and (c) ask for no additional resources” (p. 492).

### Professional Development

Odden (1991b) noted that training was critical to implementing change: “Extensive, intensive, ongoing training and classroom specific assistance for learning new instructional strategies” (p. 307). Odden also stated, “Ongoing, follow-through assistance to teachers in schools and classrooms is the *sine qua non* [italics in original] for producing change in classroom practices” (p. 324). Cohen and Hill (2001) added that reform works, but only when teachers had significant opportunities to learn. They continued, “The content of teachers’ professional development made a difference in their practice” (p. 94). McLaughlin (1987) agreed that enhancing teachers’ professional expertise was the one key to future education improvements.

Supovitz (2001) stated, “Staff development undertaken in isolation from teachers classroom duties seldom have much impact on teaching practices or student learning” (p.

83). Professional development needs to have a continuous focus in order to enhance what teachers know and are able to do so they can implement the curriculum in the classroom (Odden, 1991b, p. 312). Feedback on assessments was also important. Goertz (2001) described, “Clear goals and incentives are necessary, but not sufficient, to motivate teachers to reach their school’s student achievement goals” (p. 57).

Fairman and Firestone (2001, p. 126) indicated that “Most teachers incorporate only some aspects of the standards into their practice and that the changes they make typically center on the content of lessons more than on the instructional strategies or goals for student learning.” Standards-based teaching required subtle and deep understanding of both content and pedagogy (Fairman & Firestone, p. 142). Cohen and Hill (2001) stated that learning proceeds “by assimilating new knowledge to established ideas and mental structures. . . .Learners add new bits and patches to existing mental edifices” (p. 72). “The question is whether districts and states can muster the will and capacity to support teacher learning on a more intense level to expand standards-based teaching beyond the pockets where it occurs anyway” (Fairman & Firestone, p. 144).

Sirotnik (2002) declared, “Better teaching produces better results, but professional development is way under-funded” (p. 665). Swanson and Stevenson (2002) also found that standards-based practices were more prevalent in schools that have higher levels of instructional spending (p. 12). Fuhrman (2001) summarized that policymakers need to realize that “Accountability is not enough—it must be accompanied by capacity-building, including high quality intensive professional development” (p. 275). When policymakers focus on accountability, “they miss opportunities to foster the real source of productivity gains—the people. Fostering a sense of individual efficacy. . .places the people. . .in a

pre-eminent position and sets the stage for them to invest their energies and skills in the organization” (Astuto & Clark, 1986, p. 65).

According to Baker and Linn (2002) “There is a real appetite for learning about how results can lead to improvement” (p. 2). As Massell (2001) explained, “Performance data often are not transparent and readily understandable [and] educators often do not have the requisite knowledge and skills to translate them.” Stiggins (2001b) stated that teachers and administrators must become assessment literate. Educators must be able to gather dependable and quality information about student achievement and then they must be able to use that information effectively (Stiggins, p. 20). Massell noted that one strategy utilized by schools was to provide data analysis training to a select group of individuals. However, it was still not clear that data was going to affect local decision-making. “The evidence of problems does not automatically express what one must do about them. . . .A ‘rational’ solution is affected by the ability of teachers and administrators to implement the new strategy” (Massell, p. 167). DeBray, Parson, and Woodworth (2001), described a theory of action that “the accountability system will provide feedback on school performance that will then be used in school improvement planning” (p. 187).

### Barriers

Timar and Kirp (1987) indicated that “Policymakers. . .overlook the fact that students go to school for a variety of reasons” (p. 312). Educators and policymakers questioned the lack of student incentives (Goertz, 2001). Goertz added, “Teachers’ success is dependent on students’ efforts in school, but there is nothing in a school based

accountability system to motivate students to take the tests seriously, especially in secondary schools” (p. 42).

Wilson and Floden (2001) suggested that teacher buy-in was a factor in standards-based reform. They stated, “While some of the rhetoric would have us believe that standards based reform has the potential for transforming teaching and learning, we’d be naïve to hold such hope” (p. 215). Wilson and Floden continued, “Most educators. . . accepted and worked with the new, but ‘no one threw out the baby with the bathwater’” (p. 215). As Cohen and Hill (2001) found, “Teachers were enthusiastic about reforms but were wary of fundamental changes in classroom practices” (p. 84).

Swanson and Stevenson (2002, p. 2) stated that teachers’ professional autonomy provided an additional buffer from efforts to change practices initiated by educational administrators at the district, state, or other higher order system levels. According to Fuhrman et al. (1988), most educators and representatives of state-level education associations “complained that the reforms were ‘done to’ them” (p. 203). Cohen and Hill (2001) stated, “Teacher discretion is characteristic of teaching in the United States—this autonomy makes change very difficult” (p. 181). Sirotnik (2002) remarked that evidence was emerging about teacher demoralization and attrition. Swanson and Stevenson (2002) reported the receptiveness of teachers to policies and the school’s prior instructional climate becomes a factor. “Instructional norms may. . .play a key role in promoting change in teaching practices by providing an atmosphere conducive to innovation by teachers within the classroom” (p. 15).

Cohen and Hill (2001, p. 155) stated, “Reformers have to work within the existing system, but that system is often a powerful threat to reform.” Policymakers did not



control many local, regional, or nongovernmental influences on assessment, curriculum, or professional development. As a result, “more coherent state guidance became less coherent as it played out in the complex array of agencies” that we call the state system (p. 166).

As noted by Bay, Reys, and Reys (1999), time was a critical form of support offered to teachers. Teachers needed time to learn, discuss, think, collaborate, and synthesize. As Crandal, Eiseman, and Louis (1986) stated, “Planning for, implementing, and institutionalizing a significant change usually consumes an inordinate amount of time. School people are already busy and rarely in a position to delegate or drop some of their responsibilities while they take on new ones” (p. 42). As Crandal et al. noted, changing educators’ way of doing business takes time but, “The commitment of teachers increases as they simultaneously see themselves master the practice and perceive that their students are doing better” (p. 34). According to McLaughlin (1987, p. 175), there are few “slam bang” policy effects. It is very difficult to make school improvement happen across several layers of organizations.

### Alignment

In her introduction, Fuhrman (2001, p. 6) stated that policy alignment around standards and performance expectations—through accountability systems—assumes curriculum, assessment, teacher preparation, and professional development are all aligned. She continued, “If these things don’t align, improvement will not occur” (p. 8). Baker (2002) added that with the goal of alignment, one should not adjust one element of the system without considering its impact on the other parts (p. 6). However, as Bay et al.

(1999) warned, “Making major curricular change is like bicycling in the mountains: you work hard to master one challenge only to meet another” (p. 503).

According to Clune, “The primary measure of . . . achievement is gain on a student assessment that is in some way aligned with the reform” (2001, p. 18). In many states, however, alignment was lacking. As Cohen and Hill found in their massive study of California, “we picked up almost as much variation in instructional practices. . . within schools as between them” (2001, p. 175).

Goertz (2001) commented, “The majority of states set performance goals for students, schools and/or school systems and hold these individuals and units directly accountable” (p. 45). Baker and Linn (2002) cautioned that the limited precision in estimates of school improvement based on comparisons of successive groups of students presented a major challenge for schools. Sirotnik (2002) stated:

Assessment systems are about creating and using ways to collect information on teaching and learning and about making appraisals or judgments based on that information. . . . Other than for reasons of economy and efficiency, there is little educational justification for using easily scored tests—and only those tests—to make high-stakes decisions. (p. 665)

Scott (1998) added that without comparable units of measurement, it was difficult if not impossible to regulate or to compare (p. 29).

Goertz (2001) explained, “norm-referenced tests are designed to measure the knowledge and skills of students across the country, rather than the knowledge and skills embodied in specific state standards” (p. 55). Schmoker (2000, p. 52) agreed that the skills demonstrated on standardized tests do not represent a comprehensive or ideal level

of education. Sirotnik added, “We find ourselves—once again—mandating more and more testing of students and expecting this practice to result in better teaching and learning” (p. 665). Massell (2001) stated that school administrators supported more challenging tests that were supportive of good instruction. But these views, she continued, “coexist with criticisms of the tests” (p. 161). Bay et al. (1999) found that teachers had to invest a great deal of time just to become familiar with the assessments. Baker and Linn (2002, p. 22) noted that if tests were claimed to measure content and performance standards, then there needed to be evidence of alignment.

Sirotnik (2002) cautioned that there has been a narrowing of what gets emphasized. “Only the subjects tested—and only in the limited ways in which these subjects are tested—receive the bulk of attention” (p. 665). In her concluding remarks of an edited work covering the most current research on policy reform, Fuhrman (2001) stated that in many instances when supporting materials were missing, “content standards are the sole guidance. . . .In such situations, teachers focus on ‘what is covered on the assessment’” (p. 265). According to Lagemann (2000), qualitative researchers recognized that there were limitations in the assumption “that what cannot be measured cannot be important” (p. 222). Baker and Linn (2002, p. 13) added, “If schools are to be responsible for services other than those measured in the accountability system, such as the arts. . .or community service, such efforts must find their way into the accountability system.” Former Secretary of Education Richard Riley also cautioned against reducing the effort to one test, “If we are so consumed with making sure students pass a multiple-choice test that we throw out the arts and civics then we will be going backwards instead of forward” (cited in Shrag, 2000, p. 21).

Another concern raised by Baker and Linn (2002, p. 3) was that the rewards and sanctions may focus the attention on the bottom line, but not on the steps or processes to get there. “Put positively, the way the trip is made matters at least as much as the destination” (Scott, 1998, p. 179).

## Chapter 3

## METHODOLOGY

As described by Guba and Lincoln (1994), a paradigm is a basic set of beliefs that represents a “*worldview* [italics in original] that defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world,’ the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world” (p. 107). The paradigm, or basic beliefs that guided this research, was that of “naturalistic inquiry” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Schwandt (1994) indicated that Lincoln and Guba later began to use “the term *constructivism* [italics in original] to characterize their methodology” (p. 128). Qualitative researchers, as Creswell (1998) indicated, approach their research with a basic set of beliefs or assumptions. From the constructivist perspective, the basic beliefs or assumptions regarding methodology, the nature of reality (ontology), and the relationship of the researcher to that being researched (epistemology) in a study are different from those of the other paradigms including the positivist, postpositivist, critical theory and participatory (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 168). Charmaz (2000) stated that the constructivist distinguishes between the real and the truth. “The constructivist approach does not seek truth—single, universal, and lasting. Still, it remains realist because it addresses human realities and assumes the existence of real worlds. However, neither human realities nor real worlds are unidimensional” (p. 523). Schwandt (1994) noted that the constructivist view assumes “that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective” (p. 125).

The role of values also affect the inquiry process. As Lincoln and Guba (2000) noted that the issue of values was much larger than they first conceived. Values impact the inquiry process in a variety of ways. Thus, they contend values (axiology) should be

“a part of the basic foundational philosophical dimensions of paradigm proposal” (p. 169).

The research design, data collection, and data analysis for this study was based on qualitative methodology described by Creswell (1998). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research is “multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (p. 2). Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that naturalistic inquiry demands a natural setting because of context:

Phenomena of study, whatever they may be—physical, chemical, biological, social, psychological—*take their meaning as much from their contexts as they do from themselves* [italics in original]. . . .No phenomenon can be understood out of relationship to the time and context that spawned, harbored, and supported it. (p. 189)

As Mishler (1979) noted, the importance of context has been largely ignored by traditional research approaches and in their application to the field of education:

A prominent theme in these recent critiques is the discovery that research findings appear to be context dependent. The search for lawful generalizations that are valid across contexts has proven to be more difficult than expected and may be a misdirected search. (p. 17)

Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring them. The context of the study needed to be thoroughly illustrated with thick and rich description to enable the reader to make a decision regarding whether or not the findings were transferable (Creswell, 1998).

Qualitative researchers describe the nature of reality as being subjective. Reality is constructed by the individual (Creswell, 1998) and no two people have identical perceptions and experiences. A person's experiences will lead him or her to a unique point of view. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that from the positivist perspective of reality, "inquiry can converge onto that reality until, finally, it can be predicted and controlled" (p. 37). However, from the naturalist perspective:

There are multiple constructed realities that can be studied only holistically; inquiry into these multiple realities will inevitably diverge so that prediction and control are unlikely outcomes although some level of understanding can be achieved. (p. 37)

This qualitative study described and analyzed multiple realities (Creswell, 1998; Foley, 2002; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) by interviewing 30 educators knowledgeable in school improvement. Qualitative methodology allowed the researcher to establish a relationship and be closely connected to the participants through interviews and observations. Lincoln & Guba (1985) indicated that the inquirer interacts with the respondent and they influence one another. I was part of the process and became involved with the participants both directly and indirectly. As the researcher, I developed a relationship by establishing trust and focusing attention on the voices and feelings of the participants (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

Qualitative methodology was used in this study in order to better understand the complex processes involved in state policy implementation. I used an inductive process to move from a detailed description to themes (Creswell, 1998). As Huberman and Miles (1994) stated, the issue is not so much the ability to generalize, but rather an

“understanding of the conditions under which a particular finding appears and operates” (p. 441).

Creswell (1998) stated that qualitative inquiry is for the researcher who is willing to commit to extensive time in the field; engage in the complex and time-consuming process of data analysis; write long passages; and engage in research that does not have firm guidelines or specific procedures. Creswell then identified several reasons to undertake a qualitative study. First, qualitative research studies are designed to answer questions that ask how or what. Second, the topic needs to be explored. Third, there is a need for a detailed view. Fourth, individuals will be studied in their natural setting. Fifth, the researcher has interest in writing in a literary style. Finally, sixth, the audience is receptive. Marshall and Rossman (1989) supported the argument that qualitative inquiry is best suited for research that is “exploratory and descriptive and that stresses the importance of context, setting and the subject’s frame of reference” (p. 46).

### Site Selection

As this study examined large high schools in order to describe and analyze the process surrounding the implementation of the Accountability for Student Learning Act, the first step involved the identification of appropriate schools/districts. The Iowa High School Athletic Association designates 4-A high schools as those with enrollments greater than 700 students. For this study, three Iowa high schools with enrollments greater than 900 students were chosen. My rationale for choosing large high schools was to provide a better understanding of policy implementation from the large school perspective. Hannaway and Kimball (2001, p. 113) noted that larger districts reported more progress by principals in implementing reform, and schools in larger districts used a



strategic plan more often than smaller districts. They also stated that evidence strongly suggested that large school size had important advantages that facilitated change: “They are likely better connected to helpful resources” (p. 117).

From a personal standpoint, I am an assistant principal at a large school in Iowa. However, Morse (1994) and Creswell (1998) commented that it was not wise to conduct research in one’s own work environment or “backyard.” Thus, I was very curious to see what and how other schools implemented the Accountability for Student Learning Act, also known as House File 2272.

Multiple settings were selected to increase the trustworthiness of the study. Morse (1994) noted that the final product “may be stronger than if only one group is studied” (p. 222). Marshall and Rossman (1989) also indicated that a study designed in which multiple cases were used could strengthen the study’s usefulness for other settings.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated that many qualitative researchers use purposive sampling models. They indicated that researchers seek out “individuals where and for whom the processes being studied are most likely to occur” (p. 370). The schools purposefully selected for this study were those from which I could learn the most. Patton (1980) mentioned several strategies for selecting purposeful samples. Patton described one reason to select a site is “if that program is having problems then we can be sure all the programs are having problems.”

Active schools were purposefully identified. Fuhrman et al. (1988) described active schools as schools that do not wait for policies to happen. According to Fuhrman et al. these districts do not merely adapt to state policy, “they orchestrate and amplify policies” (p. 217) around their needs.

Seven educational leaders in Iowa from the Department of Education, School Administrators of Iowa (SAI), and superintendents and principals of high schools in the Central Iowa Metropolitan League assisted with the identification of active schools/districts as of the late spring of 2002. These educational leaders identified 18 different districts based on the reputation of the teachers and administrators of the districts as leaders in learning. The separate lists generated from this form of purposeful sampling were examined for common schools. One of the schools was identified by six of the seven individuals as an active school. Three other schools were common to the lists of four educational leaders. One school of these three schools was not considered a viable school for me to research as I have a personal connection with the high school principal. He is my father.

In order to enhance the data collection opportunities, the criteria for final selection included minimal administrative turnover from the time when the implementation began in 1998. All the schools noted above fit the criteria for minimal administrative turnover. District A was a growing suburban school district with an enrollment of just shy of 1,300 students in grades 9 through 12 for the 2001-2002 school year. District B was identified by six of the seven educational leaders. District B, enrolled nearly 1,400 students in grades 9 through 12. District C, an urban district, enrolled nearly 1,700 students in grades 9 through 12.

#### Access and Selection of Interviewees

The Directors of Curriculum were contacted at each of the districts. These school administrators were considered leaders in their field because of their elite knowledge and experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1989) regarding the school improvement process in

their districts. In each of my initial phone conversations, I explained how several educational leaders identified his/her district as outstanding and I wanted to learn more about them. I continued to communicate with each administrator by phone and e-mail. Each was provided with the statement of the problem, a summary of the study's purpose, and the research questions. Each was assured of anonymity of participants and informed that the study is not about comparing schools, evaluating performance, ranking the districts, or examining the effects on student achievement. The purpose of the study was to describe the implementation procedures used by his/her district and to provide individuals the opportunity to voice his/her recommendations to policymakers.

The Director of Curriculum became the primary link and was asked to be a liaison to the superintendent for permission to be interviewed and to have access to informants and documents in his/her district. All three superintendents agreed to be part of this research project. These Directors of Curriculum identified other key people knowledgeable with the school improvement and implementation process at the high school. The Directors of Curriculum and principals also assisted me in establishing interview schedules and locations.

Interviewees were chosen for their particular expertise. I needed to interview people who had knowledge or experiences that I wanted to know about (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Many of the individuals identified served on building improvement teams or district improvement teams. Those knowledgeable in the school improvement efforts included superintendents, directors of curriculum, director of secondary education, high school principals, associate principals, teachers, media specialists, board members, and support staff. Interviewees were asked to identify other individuals with whom I should

interview. I continued interviewing at each district until I reached the saturation point. Saturation was the point at which I did not learn any more new information with each interview (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

### Development of the Interview Protocol

The interview protocol for this study mirrored the interview protocol used by Lindaman (2003) and Wulf (2003) in their examinations of accountability and House File 2272 implementation in middle schools and high schools in Iowa (see Appendix A). The protocol included versions for teachers, administrators, and board members.

### Interviewing/Data Collection

As Stake (1994) stated, qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. For the final three weeks in the month of May 2002, I traveled throughout the state to meet with the interviewees in their environment at a time that was convenient for them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the high schools and district offices. Prior to the interview, the participants were given a summary of the study's purpose. Fontana and Frey (1994) identified ethical concerns revolving around the topics of informed consent, right to privacy, and protection from harm. Thus, anonymity and confidentiality were ensured in the Human Subjects Review Form (see Appendix B). The participants were presented a consent form delineating that participation was voluntary and they may withdraw at any time (see Appendix C).

The interviews served as the main source of data in this study by providing detailed descriptions of the school improvement process. I also took comprehensive hand-written notes during the interviews on the interview protocol handout. For this

study, each of the 30 interviews was approximately 45 minutes long. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

Field notes were written at the conclusion of each interview. Patton (1980) indicated that field notes should include anything that helped me understand the context, setting, and what went on. The descriptive field notes also included my own reactions and reflections about what had occurred.

All of the consent forms and hand-written notes were divided by school district and organized in a three-ring-binder notebook. In order to provide multiple sources of information, other relevant documents such as building improvement plans, annual progress reports, and school/district publications were collected and reviewed, as well.

### Coding

I transcribed all of the interviews from one district and enlisted the services of a transcriptionist for the other two districts. The interviews were transcribed into a data table with the headings: line range, position, speaker, text, and district (see Appendix D). The interviews were then exported to a File Maker Pro database. An additional field, theme, was added for coding.

Coding is the process of grouping interviewees' responses into categories that bring together similar ideas and concepts (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). As described by Charmaz (2002), I used the process constant comparison to develop a better understanding of the schools and their school improvement efforts. Glaser & Strauss indicated the first rule of the constant comparative method was that "while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category (cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 341).

The transcribed interviews were read and reread. As I reread the transcription, I highlighted key statements in bold. I looked for recurring statements or words using the interview protocol and research questions as guides. From these recurring statements, initial categories were developed. Each interview response was coded for themes in this way.

Wolcott (1990) advised to begin the initial sorting of data by identifying the broadest categories imaginable. He continued:

Begin sorting by finding a few categories sufficiently comprehensive to allow you to sort all your data. Remember that you are only sorting. If you are having problems with what ought to be a straightforward task, you are probably starting to develop theory, regardless of how modest. (p. 33)

The contents of the categories were reread to look for more themes and similar ideas. Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest that it is appropriate and even necessary sometimes to return to the original interviews to add new coding categories.

### Data Analysis

The purpose of the data analysis was to organize the interviews to present a narrative that described the experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Using constant comparative analysis, I looked for similar categories and statements from a variety of perspectives that captured the experiences of the individuals in the study (Janesick, 1994). A site summary was created that included a description of the context for each school. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the purpose was not to focus on the similarities that could be developed into generalizations, but to detail the specifics that gave the context its flavor. The within-case site findings described what was going on

and how things proceeded (Huberman & Miles, 1994). The themes emerging from each site were presented in the findings report.

As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), a member check in the form of a descriptive site report was presented for each location. Janesick (2000) noted that the participants to be allowed to review the material. The schools received drafts of how the interviewees were presented, quoted, and interpreted. They were asked to acknowledge the accuracy of the description. As Morse (1994) noted, the participants may offer additional stories to confirm the model.

The cross-site summary and discussion grew out of the site reports. The cross-site summary and discussion with references to the literature accounted for the patterns and themes from within and across the site reports (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). The diagram (see Appendix E) illustrates the interview data analysis process between and among sites. A list of themes was created using Excel to assist with the cross-site summary (see Appendix F). The themes were color-coded.

In the final chapter, the research is summarized and general conclusions are drawn. The researcher then drew upon her own insights and developed important if not totally demonstrable implications of what she found. The research ends with recommendations to policymakers and recommendations for further research.

## Chapter 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter includes site descriptions for each of the three schools in this study and the school districts in which they are located. Following a description of the context for each site, findings are presented by major themes concerning the implementation of House File 2272. Subsequent to the descriptions of all three sites, a cross-site summary and discussion of the findings is presented. The summary and discussion includes researcher observations and a comparison of the results of the findings of this study with previous policy implementation research.

#### District A Context

District A is a rapidly growing suburban district. The community has grown from a rural setting to a modern suburban community in little more than a decade. Since 1990, the school district's enrollment has more than doubled. Until relatively recently in historical terms, it was an agricultural community but has now witnessed rapid evolution into a modern suburb. As with many growing suburban communities, the population throughout the school year fluctuates as families move into and out of the district. The mobility rate for the high school was under 10% for the 2000-2001 school year.

At the time of this study, the Chamber of Commerce along with the economic development corporation had focused on attracting and assisting more non-agricultural businesses to the community. To accomplish its mission of improving and maintaining the local business environment, the economic development corporation became involved in numerous activities which included obtaining financial assistance for new businesses,



assisting with the zoning and site planning processes, and developing incentives to attract more businesses. The Chamber of Commerce membership increased and at the time of the study included includes more financial, insurance, and technologically oriented companies.

Even though the students came to District A with diverse backgrounds, Caucasian students make up 94% of the population. The English Language Learner Program served students from Bosnia, Croatia, Russia, the Ukraine, Guatamala, Vietnam, Mexico, China, India, Sudan, and Nigeria. However, less than 1% of the students were English Language Learners.

The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch was quite low in District A when compared to the rest of the state. In fact, if there were not more than 10 students qualified, then the district was not responsible for reporting test data. The high school for District A did not report test data for free/reduced price lunch the past four years.

Over 97% of the students graduated, whereas less than 1% of the high school students dropped out of school during the 2000-2001 school year. Nearly 86% of the seniors planned to attend a post-secondary school with the majority of those being Iowa schools. The high school students in District A taking the American College Test (ACT) averaged slightly above the state composite score of 22.0.

The Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) was given in grades 9-12. The results of these tests indicated that the school, on average, ranked in the upper 10% in the nation. District A also performed well when compared to other Iowa schools on the ITED, typically in the upper 25%.

District A was attentive to students with special needs. The special education department serves over 10% of District A's students. Residential facilities for children with disabilities and other special needs were located within the district. The students came from all over the state and received educational services from the school district.

Parent involvement was valued and welcomed in District A. The schools worked hard to provide opportunities for parents to assist in the day-to-day operation of the schools, such as volunteering in classrooms, mentoring students across the curriculum, guest speaking to classes, being homeroom parents, coaching and judging events, and being chaperones for dances and field trips. Parents also supported the school through memberships in the P.T.O., Booster Club, and other clubs such as band, vocal, and Technology Student Association.

Finally, the district's rapid growth from a small agricultural community to a booming suburb had impacted the number of certified teachers. Nearly 37% of the teachers had been teaching less than 5 years at District A, whereas less than 7% of the teachers had more than 20 years with the district. Thirty percent of the certified teachers had at least a Master's Degree.

### District A Findings

Several themes emerged from the interviews regarding school improvement at District A. The activities of District A prior to House File 2272 will be described, as well as the perceived purpose of 2272, the perceived impact of 2272 on the district, and the role of leadership. In addition, descriptions of the perceived barriers will be included. District A findings' section will conclude with the educators' recommendations to the legislators.

*Prior to House File 2272*

There was a general sense that the district was way ahead of the legislation in school improvement efforts. Participants felt that their district has always been active and ahead of the curve as they had previously established a framework and in-service philosophies. A support staff member described it this way, “[We] have always had a high priority on being an excellent school district. We don't want to let anybody down. Particularly kids.”

*Framework.* Participants described the district's framework and belief statements as being forward thinking. The belief statements were approved by the Board of Education in 1995. According to one participant,

If I look at the things this district did, Jody, our framework was far ahead of where districts needed to be. That gave us a vision of where to go. Developing belief statements, coming up with functional results, they were big picture things that gave our district and our community a real good vision of where they were and where the path was beginning to take us.

The framework was not a document in a binder on a shelf collecting dust. The framework and belief statements were referred to continually in District A. One person described linking initiatives to the framework by stating, “It always has to connect back to our framework.”

*In-service.* In-service for staff and teachers was a valued commodity in the district. In addition to the in-service throughout the year, the district committed several days at the beginning of the school year to provide training for the new members joining the district. Four days were spent discussing the vision for the district, the framework, brain-based learning, multiple intelligences, functional results, and the mission statement. A new staff member described the in-service in this way:

When I came to the district, I didn't have the sense that what we were doing was because of the state mandates. I had the sense that what we were doing was because it was good for kids. It was sound practice. It was founded in solid research. The things we were doing, we were doing for the right reasons.

In 1994, the district invested heavily in teacher leaders. They used that trainer-train model from the development of the framework to the district assessment team, and to the school improvement facilitators that were leading mapping. According to one trainer, "We had our small group of people that really knew what was going on and it just kept spreading out like concentric rings." The in-service included two years of training on brain research and two years of training on group processing. The trainer-train concept worked well as it modeled effective strategies and instilled ownership in the process. A young teacher commented,

I think that is a valuable tool that district did implement. We don't have one teacher stand up in an auditorium and lecture to the rest of the staff about what strategies they can use in the classroom. Basically we have little workshops and it is very inclusive.

The district also did a great deal of in-service in assessment and good assessment practices. They were focusing on developing quality classroom assessment and using that assessment to inform instruction. Approximately 40 people went to a conference in Nashville back in 1994-1995 for training on assessments.

*Purpose of House File 2272*

Staff members and administrators expressed a variety of opinions regarding the purpose of House File 2272. The following segment will describe the participants' perceptions of the purpose: compliance, accountability, comparisons, and improved schools.

*Compliance.* One high-ranking district official indicated the purpose of House File 2272 was a matter of compliance with the 1994 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The policy required standards and benchmarks, assessments, and reporting processes. She stated, "It really wasn't that inconsistent with 280.12 and 280.18, but it was more prescriptive. Certainly it resulted in a major rewrite of Iowa Code."

Teachers had the perception that there was interplay between the United States Department of Education and the State Department of Education. One teacher indicated, "The federal government was really pushing schools to be accountable." A district official believed, too, that there was considerable dialogue between the federal government and the state department of education.

[Iowa] had to get into compliance with the 1994 ESEA. The federal funds were going to stop. That was the final last minute agreement. They were about 24

hours away from losing all the federal funds. That is the reality of it. Most of that stuff was struck by the department of education with the federal government and it went back to the legislature. Our word from the department of education from the 1994 ESEA was 'we are working on the waiver and we won't ever establish state standards and state benchmarks and state assessments.' In effect, what they did was make 382 school districts do that themselves.

*Accountability.* Other staff members and administrators identified that the purpose of House File 2272 centered on holding the teachers and district accountable for increased student achievement. There was the perception among the staff that the legislature was looking at how to make the schools accountable for what they were doing. The teachers believed that the legislators thought that if they put some standards and some high expectations on student achievement that everything would be affected. As one teacher stated, "I definitely feel like student achievement and the accountability factor is at the heart of those mandates." She went on to say

We have been a top education state for a number of years, but I believe our state realizes the value in seeing growth. I think mandates kind of have a dual purpose. They encourage growth of the district, but they are also a way to help provide local control.

*Comparisons.* Another opinion expressed by the teachers about the purpose of House File 2272 was to compare the schools within the state and across the country. The perception was that creating standards and benchmarks began a standardization process by which one could compare districts. One teacher noted, "It does give us a good

reflection on how our kids are in comparison to kids in California or Georgia or who ever it might be.”

One staff member spoke out against the comparisons in the local and state paper. At the time of the interview, there was an article in the paper about 26 elementary schools that were below standard. The teacher lamented, “Do you think it is the school? Or do you think it is the clientele that is there that causes those things? I hope their motive wasn't just to pressure schools or to identify schools that are struggling.”

*Improved schools.* Educators identified school improvement as another purpose of House File 2272. According to one teacher, the main purpose of the law was to motivate schools to develop plans, create a way to implement the plans, and then find a way to assess the plan and action steps. Teachers believed the legislature’s intention was to get schools to establish short-term and long-term goals on steps to improve what they are doing. One administrator believed that it was “appropriate systemic reform.” The law does force the district to “take a good look at their internal workings.” Another administrator noted, “it was intended to provide schools with an avenue for focusing their school improvement plans.”

A different teacher added, “Well, ESEA, I am sure had some genuinely good-natured intent to it. But I believe the intent is to assist school districts that need that assistance.”

### *Impact of House File 2272*

The theme regarding the impact House File 2272 had on the district and the high school emerged from the interviews. Some people indicated the law provided a push to

continue moving in a direction. Other individuals stated the law diverted their school improvement efforts.

*Focus.* Several staff members indicated the law had a significant impact on the district. It was believed that the mandates helped to provide a clarity and focus for their direction. As one administrator commented, “We are meeting the mandates. We think it is improving us as a school district. I think it has helped sharpen our focus.” The law supplied the tool to put the focus where it needed to be. Everything they did was centered on the students and teaching and learning.

The law drove the leadership teams at the high school and what they did during in-service. Describing the impact on in-service activities, a teacher stated, “It drives us to make sure that what we do do during that time is useful and really does make a difference with student learning. Valuable time is not wasted.”

*Goals.* House File 2272 impacted the way the district set goals. For many years prior to House File 2272, District A had building goals and district goals. In the past, most goals were process-oriented goals and House File 2272 required results-oriented goals. The law impacted the school by shifting the goal-setting from a mixture of affective and cognitive goals to more cognitive goals. A teacher summarized the previous goal-setting process, “We would have brain storming sessions and the principal would come up with some building goals. Many of them were school climate goals, like, ‘reduce the number of students tardy to class.’” The participants described a much stronger focus on reading, math and science. An administrator noted, “[The law] almost established our goals for us!”



*Data.* House File 2272 significantly impacted the way the district used data. The law forced the district to focus more systematically on data and on student achievement specifically. A high-ranking district official tapped the desk to emphasize her point,

Our principals are looking at data. One principal stated, 'I've got this many students that have moved from not proficient to proficient.' We have never looked at data that closely in the past. We are frequently analyzing data.

Teachers described how they were looking at data. The leadership teams examined ITED data, Mid Iowa Assessment Level Test (MIALT) results, ACT item-analysis data, and performance task results. One teacher commented that, "We are learning more as we go through every year about ways to use the data." Staff members worked to create charts and graphs, and different ways to manipulate data. The district created a student achievement template to get data to teachers. A staff member summarized the impact by saying, "We are using data more regularly to make decisions than we did before."

*Assessment.* House File 2272 considerably impacted District A with its assessment efforts. Previously, a great deal of work had been done to train teachers on quality classroom assessment that would inform their instruction. The law mandated the use of multiple assessments and multiple formats. This diverted the district's focus from quality classroom assessment to large-scale assessment.

The school established a school-wide assessment team (SWAT) in response to the law to lead the charge. The SWAT team met with a consortium of schools to examine the standards and benchmarks to get a general sense of the essential learnings. A

criterion-referenced test (MIALT) was developed that was leveled. The teachers appreciated the data they got back from the MIALT. One teacher commented, “You can show growth from fall to spring. It definitely comes right out of what the kids are learning in our building.” The assessment connects with the curriculum and the district’s standards and benchmarks. As challenging as it was to develop and score the tasks, teachers appreciated the multiple assessments. One teacher voiced her concern, “It is scary to try to label a student’s worth from one standardized test.”

*Infusion.* Many participants described the impact of House File 2272 on classroom instruction. Assessments and data analysis were just one aspect. The next step was to bring it full circle to affect classroom instruction. A teacher stated, “We have focused this last couple of years not just on creating and assessing those standards and benchmarks, but on using the data from those assessments to impact what we do in the classroom.”

“Infusion” was a key word used by nearly all of the educators interviewed. The various leadership teams were examining ways to write and present the curriculum across the disciplines. For example, the reading team presented to the entire staff some strategies for the teachers to use in their classrooms to improve reading skills. In response to that presentation, a teacher commented, “It helps me to incorporate some of those things into my class. Just being more aware and having kids take turns reading out loud to the rest of the class. Yah, they are impacting what I do in the classroom.”

*Conversations.* House File 2272 impacted the conversations among the teachers and administrators about student achievement. The process prompted discussions about

goals and curriculum. Teachers questioned each other about what kids need to learn and be able to do. One staff member stated,

It just changed those whole conversations. There wasn't always agreement, in fact there was disagreement. But it was an educational debate, as well. It was good conversation. We had conversations that we probably wouldn't have had if we were continuing to look at goals the way we did in the past.

Leadership teams met repeatedly to develop and revise rubrics to assess the students' writing and communication performance assessments. A teacher noted, "Just having that discussion among educators was really good. It helps you with your rubrics, what you are understanding and what your classroom expectations are for your kids." In-service provided time for staff to collaborate about the strategies that they have implemented in the classroom to help achieve the goal areas.

The conversations regarding curriculum were to continue into the following year. They planned to discuss the completed curriculum maps. They were to look for gaps and overlaps, and determine where the curriculum maps connected with the standards and benchmarks. A teacher described the curriculum map's function, "I think ultimately it is a reflection tool. By mapping what you teach, you get a chance to reflect. You get the chance to have conversations with other colleagues."

*Initiatives.* House File 2272 impacted new initiatives in the district. Curriculum maps were an initiative required of everyone as a result of the school improvement process. The curriculum maps were seen as the beginning of painting the big picture. Using the trainer-train model, trainers introduced the concept of the curriculum mapping

to the staff. The trainers taught it, demonstrated it, and designed the handouts that helped the teachers map the curriculum.

A second initiative which began in the fall of 2002 required teacher portfolios at the high school. The teacher portfolios were intended to connect to the curriculum maps. The teachers gathered evidence for what they did in their classrooms that supported the standards and benchmarks, building goals, and district goals--which connected to the framework.

### *Role of Leadership*

Participants indicated the administration was visionary and supportive. They encouraged teachers to be leaders. This segment will identify the participants' perceptions of the role of leadership in the district and the high school.

*Visionary.* Many participants commented that the leadership did an excellent job of asking what is out there. The district stayed ahead of the curve and anticipated things down the road. A staff member acknowledged the district's leadership for beating the curve.

Ahead of somebody saying 'you need to do this and that,' we were beating the curve. Dr. X and Dr. Y have been visionary in that way. If we had a mission, it was to be proactive in anything that we can.

*Supportive.* The administration was willing to listen to staff members. Without that kind of support, the initiatives were not going to go very far. Staff members felt fortunate to have administrators that valued the staff members' thoughts. That kind of administrative support encouraged more involvement.

*Teacher leaders.* The administration encouraged staff members to be leaders in the school. Staff members were involved in the building improvement team (BIT). The BIT developed the improvement plan. The team was involved in presenting the plan to the other staff members. Staff members were involved in the leadership of carrying out the plan. As one team member stated, “The involvement of people other than the administration has been a big help. And I think having our administration encourage staff members to be leaders in the school has been beneficial.” A high-ranking administrator acknowledged the staff members as leaders and stated,

We have invested pretty heavily in teacher leaders. We have used that model from our framework to our district assessment team, to our school improvement facilitators that are leading mapping. That has been a successful model for us. We have had from 15 to 25 teachers get very extensive training and they have led the training efforts back in their buildings.

### *Barriers*

Participants were very open when asked to discuss the barriers to the implementation process. This segment will describe the four perceived barriers: buy-in, time, assessment, and workload.

*Buy-in.* Every participant interviewed identified teacher buy-in as a barrier to the implementation process. Student buy-in was also mentioned as a barrier. It became a challenge to convince the staff and students that the school improvement initiatives were going to be worthwhile.

Staff buy-in was perceived in two ways. The first aspect identified the experienced staff members who had been in education for many years as being resistant to change. Some teachers were heard to say, “We did these things years ago and now we are doing it again. These fads come and go. I just want to come to school and teach.” Bringing people on board was a real challenge—especially as the organization grew. There were some people that refused to buy-in no matter how hard others tried to get them to actively invest time and energy into the process. These people were not considered bad people in and of themselves, but they did not contribute to the school improvement effort.

A second aspect contributing to the lack of staff buy-in was related to cross-curricular instruction. It was a very difficult paradigm shift to get the teachers to understand the significance of cross-curricular instruction. Elective teachers did not feel validated as the focus was on reading, math, and science. People did not show an interest in art, music, drama, or auto. Still other staff members were heard to say, “I’m a math teacher, I am not a reading teacher.”

Student buy-in was identified as a challenge. Some students were not intrinsically motivated to take the ITEDs or MIALT. A student was noted as stating, “Why would I try if I’m not going to get a grade? If you gave me a grade for doing this assessment, I would do much better.” Another student wanted to know if he could stop when he reached the proficient level on the MIALT. Many other students were called in sick by their parents on testing days. A teacher compared the students’ lack of motivation for testing to her regular classroom.

I would guess it is not that much different from my classroom. I give assignments to my students because I know it is important for them to do. I get some of them to buy into it and they understand it and they get it. They make progress because of it and they move on. Some kids do it because they have to. They do it fine. But they don't really understand the purpose behind it. And there are some kids who just barely get by without any effort.

*Time.* Another barrier that the staff wrestled with was time. Teachers and administrators felt that they did not have enough time to implement all the things that the state mandated. The district provided time on teacher leadership days and in-service days to work on the initiatives. Everyone's perception was different on what time really meant and what time it takes. However, the consistent perception was that there was never enough time to get it all done. As one staff member noted, time became "a nasty four-letter word."

*Assessment.* The participants identified assessment as a barrier and voiced many concerns regarding assessments. Several individuals were not pleased with being forced to use the ITBS/ITED as one assessment for meeting the district and building goals. A staff member stated, "ITEDs make it impossible to meet the goals. For us to move students into the proficient or above category set at the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile, some other school has to go down. That is not in keeping with all students improving." Teachers expressed concerns regarding the definition of proficiency. A standardized norm-referenced test was being used for criterion purpose. A staff member questioned, "What is proficient? Proficient isn't norm-referenced. Proficient is criterion-referenced." Another staff

member described the unique special-needs' student population at her school. The students were physically and mentally challenged and were not capable of reaching the previously defined 40<sup>th</sup> percentile proficiency level. Proficient for those students was not the same as proficient for a regular education student.

The precision of the assessment was identified as a barrier. Schools were going to be identified as meeting or not meeting their goals. The standard error of measurement was quite large on the achievement assessments. The school's growth expectations were less than the standard error of measurement. One frustrated educator described the scenario, "When you are trying to grow .8% and your standard error of measure is greater than that, you can make your goal by simply retesting the kids the next week. Or you can miss it. They are not precise assessments."

Teachers and administrators wanted to see the connections between the curriculum and the assessments. An administrator emphatically stated that

ITBS does not represent anyone's curriculum. We have to align what we do with a company out of state that has no connections in our state and try to do better at that test so we can meet the expectations set forth by the federal government!

The administrators and teachers felt more comfortable with a criterion referenced test called the MIALT. The MIALT was written for all of the district's standards and benchmarks, whereas ITEDs were not. With a norm-referenced test like the ITED, it was very difficult to show growth. The school attempted to move to a criterion-referenced test. However, the school reached a blockade with their Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP). At the time of this study, their CSIP was frozen and every one



of their goals was tied to the ITED. They were not able to change the assessment tool used to the MIALT.

The teachers were also fearful that the ITEDs would impact their jobs. Teachers were willing to be accountable for how much their students grew in a year, but not if the growth was to be measured by the ITED. Teachers feared that was the direction they were heading.

*Workload.* The teachers and administrators felt a definite change in the workload, which emerged as another barrier. There were so many things going on all at once that people felt stretched. As one teacher described, “There isn't a teacher in the building that wouldn't tell you it's a whole lot of work. Some would tell you it is all garbage. Someone might even tell you it's a bunch of shit.”

The multiple assessments added to the workload of the teachers and administrators. Staff members described the overloaded feeling when they received a “Judy letter” from the state. Not only were they to provide multiple assessments, they had to provide multiple formats. They decided to create a performance assessment. That was a “HUGE” amount of work. A teacher described the reasoning behind that decision,

There are probably some other awesome performance-based tests that we could purchase and not have to score, but we decided to create our own. We found that the assessments that were pre-made, didn't strike through the heart of what we wanted to assess.

### *Recommendations*

Participants openly shared recommendations for the legislators. The staff members described three main recommendations that will be reviewed in greater depth in the following section. The recommendations emerging from the interviews included assessment, look and listen, and local control.

*Assessment.* The participants strongly encouraged the legislature to consider using a criterion- referenced assessment rather than a standardized test like the ITED. They did not understand the legislature’s intended purpose for the use of the standardized test. Teachers were very concerned about attaching high stakes to the standardized assessments. When questioning whether the legislators understood norm-referenced tests, a teacher asked, “Do they know that in order to have 50% above, you have to have 50% below?” Some teachers felt that the situation was leading to the requirement to pass a proficiency test in order to receive a diploma.

The educators were leery of the definition of proficient. “What is proficient here in Iowa and what is proficient in Texas?” Other teachers commented that there was more to it than one test score. A teacher feared that her peers would look at the elements of a standardized test and teach to the test rather than draw on best-practices research and theory. An administrator cautioned that if Iowa was going to be successful, then “they needed to develop a criterion referenced assessment that creates a strong bar.”

*Look and listen.* The participants recommended that the legislators look around and pay attention to what was going on in the national scene. The educators felt that the

events in North Carolina, New York, Texas, and California made their way to Iowa. The legislators should have anticipated what was about to happen in Iowa.

The educators recommended that the legislators include them in more conversations. They perceived that legislation was delivered to them from people who had nothing to do with education. An administrator noted,

Seldom do they bring us to the table to say how will this impact schools? How can we make it work better? I don't think Pioneer would ever make decisions about growing corn without bringing corn growing experts to the table.

She recommended legislators talk to the people involved in the process. A teacher indicated that communication must be both ways. She stated that more educators needed to feel comfortable communicating with legislators. She advised, "They will listen to you. They don't always do what you want, of course. But, they'll listen to you."

However, a different teacher stated much of the responsibility for the communication of legislation was put on the schools' shoulders. He advised that legislators initiate that process and actively pursue discussions.

Several educators want to see a politician actually come and visit schools and classrooms for a week. Legislators were advised to find a school and sit in a classroom for a week straight to see what school was really like. A similar recommendation was made to follow a student for a day to better identify the students' perspectives.

*Local Control.* The participants from District A closed their recommendations by thanking the legislators for advocating for local control. They did want more flexibility for the local schools within the mandates. A lead teacher commented, "If we can prove that we are doing well, then don't make us jump through more hoops if we are already

there.” The educators also worried that ESEA will force the legislature to mandate a state assessment. The teachers understood the pressure felt by the legislators to conform to what other states were doing. They don’t want the legislature to buckle under the pressure. One teacher pleaded, “Fight for my right to keep local control, please, please, please.”

### District B Context

Industry in this city began in the late 1800s in the form of lime, brick, and tile. Growth was rapid and after 1900 the city grew as a service, retail, and distribution center with the addition of cement, pork packing, and beet sugar industries. Located in the heartland with rapid access to an Interstate as well as other major highways, many national and international companies had chosen to locate their operations in this community. The Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Corporation worked to assist all types of businesses become productive and profitable. They partnered with the schools to enhance the environment for the benefit of the entire community.

A health industry also had had a long history in the community dating back to the early 1900s. At the time of this study, this industry employed nearly 3,000 people, many of those in a single center that was one of the largest employers in the area. The health industry was engaged in both care-giving and in medical education. A single medical network included several rural hospitals and multiple clinics in the area.

Artistic expression was an important part of this community. For over 60 years the community hosted an arts festival. Thousands of people participated in the festival each year. The citizens were proud of award-winning attractions, including music, puppets, prairie-school architecture, museums, and malls.

The city has had a very stable population for the past two decades, but the school district had experienced a declining enrollment over the past decade by nearly 350 students. During that same time period the high school maintained an enrollment of nearly 1,300 students. Due to the loss of students in the primary grades, the district restructured the pre-kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade programming. In total, at the time of this study, the district employed nearly 340 teachers with over 80 teachers at the high school for 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> graders. Thirty-five percent of the teachers had earned a master's degree or beyond. Six teachers in the district were Nationally Board Certified.

The Iowa Test of Educational Development was given to the 11<sup>th</sup> graders. The overall percentage of the district's students who were proficient in reading, math, and science was higher than the state average, with females outperforming males in the critical subject areas of reading, math, and science. In similar within-school comparisons, minority populations were quite small in all grade levels. In fact, students of Hispanic origin were the only ethnic group that had more than 10 students in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, but they performed well on standardized tests in science though not as well as their white peers in reading and math.

Finally, as a general sense of the measure of the importance of education to the community, in the year prior to this study nearly 84% of the 2000-2001 seniors planned to attend a post-secondary school. The majority of those students planned to enroll in a community college. The drop out rate for the district as reported for grades 7-12 was slightly above 2.5%.

## District B Findings

Several themes emerged from the participants and the interviews regarding school improvement at District B. The activities of District B prior to House File 2272 will be described, as well as the perceived purpose of 2272, and the perceived impact of 2272 on the district. In addition, descriptions of the perceived barriers will be included. District B findings' section will conclude with the educators' recommendations to the legislators.

### *Prior to House File 2272*

The participants interviewed agreed with the superintendent's commonly used phrase of being "on the cutting edge." There was a sense that the district was always involved in new initiatives. This section will describe the district's actions prior to House File 2272, including the action planning process, school improvement model, and standards and benchmarks.

*Action planning process.* Prior to House File 2272, the former superintendent initiated an action planning process for the district. The intent of the process was to have buildings involved in annual planning that focused on reading and math. The buildings used achievement data and a variety of other indicators to write their annual action plans. From the building action plans, the board developed a set of district goals and board goals. As a result of these activities, moving into the goal planning process established by the Department of Education was not perceived as being difficult. A board member stated, "We were already doing that, but the law finally said this has to be done. We were already moving ahead."

*School improvement model.* The general perception was that the district has always had a plan to be on target with initiatives that were happening. As one teacher commented, “We’ve been doing our model for a long, long time.” The district had several organized structures to assist with the action planning and school improvement process, including a district leadership team. An administrator noted, “We did not have to invent building level structures. We had building leadership teams and study groups in place.” A teacher stated, “I think we were ahead of the state in a lot of ways. We were doing it voluntarily. Because we felt that was the only way to do it.”

*Standards and benchmarks.* The Director of Curriculum led the charge to establish standards and benchmarks in the early 1990s. Long before the law, their standards and benchmarks were in place. As one teacher described, “It goes back to outcomes based education. We started these standards and things long ago. So it wasn’t just a huge thing that was dumped on our staff all at once.”

#### *Purpose of House File 2272*

Staff members and administrators expressed a variety of opinions regarding the purpose of House File 2272. The following segment will describe the three themes emerging from the interviews regarding the intended purpose of the law: student achievement, school improvement, and accountability.

*Student achievement.* The perception of those interviewed was that the law intended to address the achievement of students in terms of reading, math, and science. The educators felt the legislature believed there would be an improvement with mandated testing. The legislators saw that there were schools in Iowa where student achievement

was not at the level they wanted it to be. An administrator included the legislature when she commented, “We were all going to do something to improve kids’ education.”

*School improvement.* Another extension of student achievement was school improvement. The educators felt there was a push to ensure that all districts had some things in place to improve their schools. The law intended to make all districts more accountable for what they were doing and to have an organized school improvement plan. The perception was that the legislature wanted to create some uniformity in terms of what students knew as they moved through the system. An administrator commented on the intent of the law for school improvement:

Other incentives behind 2272 included, getting, forcing, coercing, or whatever verb you want to pick, schools to engage in the dialogue and improvement process. It is a way of dragging along some schools that hadn’t been doing that for a long time. House File 2272 was a law for a few that affected many.

*Accountability.* The widespread perception of those interviewed was that the law intended to address accountability as it related to funding. The general belief was that the legislators had to justify that the dollars allocated to education were being used in a way that improved student achievement. As one educator stated, “When they are spending 60% of the state’s money on public education, I guess they have a right to ask those kinds of questions. Ultimately, it is their way of saying we are trying to lead to a higher level of accountability.”



*Impact of House File 2272*

The third theme to emerge from the interviews related to the impact House File 2272 had on the district and the high school. Many people indicated the law provided the district and the school with a push to get focused, to modify the goal-setting process, to involve more people in the process, and to increase the level of awareness.

*Focus.* The prevalent perception of those interviewed was that the law narrowed the district's focus on school improvement. It became apparent to those involved in the process that students would benefit and learn from the increased focus on achievement. One veteran teacher openly commented, "I have to say in all honestly, it feels like this is the first initiative in my experience as an educator that exists in reality rather than just on paper." The law provided a much needed sense of direction. A board member believed the teachers were receptive to the initiatives and that much was accomplished.

The schools lost some autonomy as the focus narrowed. An administrator noted, "It's very easy for buildings to become independent little kingdoms. Now, everybody has a common focus that they all answer to." A different administrator also commented on the loss of autonomy:

Before we were like islands connected by a small peninsula—the kids going from building to building. It was different to say to the building leaders, 'no, here are the four areas we are going to work on.' This has narrowed our focus.

*Goals.* House File 2272 impacted the goal setting process used at District B. In the past, the board and the superintendent set all those goals. The superintendent committed time and effort to educate the board of the different process. The process was intended to be a grassroots approach to school improvement rather than top down. An administrator described the goal setting change:

After 2272, we just kind of flipped that on its head. People were used to goals, planning and action planning. That was in our culture. What changed was, the district leadership team and school improvement team developed the goals and then the buildings wrote the action plans.

*Involvement.* The school community became more involved in the improvement process after House File 2272. The pervasive opinion of those interviewed was that the increased involvement truly impacted their school. District B had a structure in place to discuss changes that had implications beyond the teachers and the students. Over 50 people facilitated the district-wide meetings to discuss the school improvement goals. The facilitators were not all certified staff.

A teacher stated, “I think the biggest thing is having everyone involved: kids, parents, bus drivers. . . .Each group was involved in understanding how you’ll do your part. I think that has made us a better community.” An administrator described the organizational change, “Prior to 2272, we had a 280.12 committee, building leadership teams, other advisory groups, and faculty that were involved in our school improvement goals. But it wasn’t as widespread in terms of the organization as it is now.” A different administrator described the purpose of the involvement:

We felt everybody needed to understand what the long-range goals were. Each employee group could help the district move towards the accomplishment of those goals. Everyone understands that you have a role to play, even if you don't teach reading or you don't teach math. There are things you can do that support those goals.

Involving more people in the process went beyond everyone doing his/her part.

The administrator also described a second purpose as it related to communication:

The people who aren't assigned to the classroom are powerful. Their perceptions about what goes on in the classroom are valid and everybody believes that they know. How can we give them the accurate information that they need in order to be ambassadors and communicators?

*Awareness.* The participants expressed an increased level of awareness of the goals and school improvement efforts. The teachers perceived their peers were using a common language. That common language was not present prior to the law. The school improvement plan raised the teachers' awareness of the reading, math, and affective goals. More connections were being made across the curriculum. A teacher stated, "All the disciplines have found how reading and math affects their subjects. They can incorporate reading and math skills into their particular disciplines. That's a good thing."

## *Barriers*

Participants expressed that there were barriers to the implementation process. One participant stated that District B was not unique, “Every school district in the state of Iowa had some kind of implementation problem.” This segment will describe the five perceived barriers to the implementation process experienced by District B: buy-in, time, assessment, workload, and funding.

*Buy-in.* The district experienced a challenge getting people to buy-in to the school improvement process. The leaders in the district had to educate the community that this was the law and not something they dreamed up. A teacher described one segment of the staff, “We always have the older group of teachers that have lived through all these changes. They have the attitude that it will go away.”

One participant commented, “I know that teachers are reluctant to change. Whatever change is going to take place is going to be met with some resistance. There will be some people that are simply not going to change.” The teachers wanted the changes to be meaningful and relevant. The teachers wanted to see results. One teacher exclaimed, “You really have to sell me on this. How is this really going to improve how my students are doing in my class?” An administrator acknowledged, “If those actions imbedded in the long-range plan do not have direct implications for their classrooms, then it’s very hard to make teachers care about that.”

*Time.* Another barrier identified by the participants was time. As one teacher avowed, “Time is a huge, huge issue.” Those interviewed described there was not enough time to get everyone together, to process and reflect, or to get the work done.

One teacher stated, “The hardest part was finding a time that everyone could get together. When you have coaches, people who teach at night, and people with family obligations it was difficult finding time to meet.”

Another teacher described the need for more half days. “Time is just getting worse, not better. We need think time. We need time to sit around and brainstorm a little. We need time to incorporate strategies.” The teachers wanted half days without students. They were given half-days with a substitute teacher. Time became the barrier as the teacher still prepared lesson plans for the substitute and took work home from class after the meeting. It was not considered much of a trade-off. A teacher summarized by asking, “How do you turn 15 hours into 8 hours?”

*Assessment.* The participants described assessment as a barrier to the implementation process. The standardized norm-referenced tests were perceived to be a barrier. The Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) was not connected to the curriculum. Administrators felt they were doing more interesting things for students when they focused on interdisciplinary assessments that were aligned to the instruction and aligned to the district’s learning goals. The assessments were rigorous and challenging. An administrator declared:

There is no way you can know how ITEDs relate to your curriculum. You can’t build curriculum around ITEDs. But now we have to build all of our school improvement around them. I don’t think that is the best thing to be building school improvement around.

However, teachers commented on the district-made assessments. They questioned the validity of an assessment created, administered, and scored by the district. One

teacher described, “We sat and graded the assessment. Teachers were saying, ‘Three is passing and 2 is not going to pass. I’m going to give a 3 so our district looks good.’ Which is a bunch of crap. Where’s the validity?”

The assessments were also perceived as a barrier because they required a great deal of the teachers’ and students’ time. Teachers spent hours and days creating, administering, scoring, and analyzing the students’ assessments. Eleventh graders were pulled out of classes for approximately four days to take the various assessments. One teacher exclaimed, “We have such a huge chunk of time being spent on assessment. We need to figure out a way to make the reading and writing tests part of the curriculum instead of this huge elephant outside.”

*Workload.* The educators felt overwhelmed by the amount of work that was added to their plates. Teachers perceived that there was more work than could be done in an 8-hour day. One teacher commented, “To me the workload is a significant barrier. People know that they are doing a lot already. Nothing gets abandoned. Okay, now we have to do one more thing.” Another teacher lamented, “On top of it, not only do you have benchmarks and assessments, we try to do data conferencing, which again we were mandated to do. Where does it stop?” A different teacher summarized by asking, “When am I supposed to teach my class and grade my papers?”

*Funding.* Money was perceived by many participants to be a barrier. In the past, money was available for teachers to do curriculum work in the summer. As one administrator stated, “Money is a factor for everything in the district. It’s getting tighter

and tighter. You know the old saying ‘you have to do more with less’ is getting to be true.”

Phase III funds were used to support the district’s school improvement initiatives. As an administrator described, “We used Phase III for what it was intended. For change, for innovation, for extending teachers’ time to get the skill sets they needed to develop understandings and skills. We are very concerned about how to maintain our momentum.” Another administrator expressed concern for the decline in Phase III funding:

With Phase III there’s accountability to do something. It doesn’t just show up on the paycheck. We’re going to lose all that. We’re not going to be able to offer graduate courses. We won’t be able to hire subs and bring the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers for an evaluation of student data. I’m really concerned.

A district administrator expressed concern for the loss of funding to support leadership initiatives related to school improvement. The AEA sponsored a summer leadership institute, where they brought in speakers and presenters to talk about issues related to school improvement. “Years ago, when money wasn’t an issue, you could bring your district’s leadership team to this....There was a lot of team time to talk about school improvement goals.” Another participant expressed concern for the state’s economic situation, “We use the term un-funded mandates so frequently. I can see more of that coming down the line because the state is limited in the amount of aid it can give the schools.”

### *Recommendations*

In this last segment, the participants from District B offer their recommendations to the legislators. Four themes emerged from the interviews: funding, infrastructure, listen and visit, and local control. The educators agreed with one another when they made recommendations; however, there were two different opinions regarding local control.

*Funding.* The participants referred to House File 2272 as the unfunded mandate. The legislators needed to know that if schools were to change, then that change was going to take money. If the funding was not available, then a board member requested the legislature to, “hold up on it a little bit.”

Concerns were also voiced for the lack of financial resources provided to the Department of Education. The technical assistance provided to the local districts by the Department of Education fell short. An administrator explained, “The DE’s got to have the kind of money to hire good people and keep good people to provide technical assistance to the districts. They don’t have the manpower.”

*Infrastructure.* The participants stated that the emphasis for school improvement was in the wrong place. The educators agreed that it was fine to hold schools accountable for student achievement, but the question was asked, “How are our communities and legislators accountable for providing the infrastructure along with the achievement?” An administrator expressed concern for school reform and funding, “If legislators were truly interested in reform, they would fund a longer school year for teachers. We’re never going to have reform to the depth and breadth that the students deserve until we have a 21<sup>st</sup> century school calendar.” He continued:



I believe 95% of the students can learn rigorous content when given the appropriate time and opportunity. I don't believe the legislators are willing to fund the infrastructure to make that happen. If a student doesn't know it by May 30, then what? Does she get to go until June 30th, or until she knows it?

Educators stated the curriculum would also benefit from more time in the summer. They expressed the need to have more time to learn new things and restructure curriculum. The teachers felt that the additional time in the summer would enhance collaboration within the district.

*Listen and visit.* The general perception of the participants was that the legislators were uninformed when they drafted the mandates. The educators wanted the lawmakers to remain connected with their constituents. They requested that the legislators listen to the people and come visit the schools. They encouraged the legislators to involve more professionals in the drafting of legislation. The board member wanted the opportunity for more town meetings so legislators could listen to the teachers, administrators, and board members who know better than politicians. Teachers wanted the legislators to get information directly from the schools rather than the polls. An administrator recommended legislators teach a class for a week. He stated,

Don't try and mandate what you don't understand. Go spend five days somewhere teaching 2nd grade, or five days in a BD pod, or five days teaching language arts to 7th graders in the spring. Visiting one day doesn't give a true picture. Do that and then talk about what it takes to be teacher. Legislators just don't have a context for it. Just because they went to school doesn't mean they know what the profession is all about.

A high school teacher became adamant:

I've got kids dealing with pregnancies, friends who've been killed, friends who have committed suicide, parents who have divorced. There are so many things going on in my classroom on a daily basis. Plus, there are all of the initiatives: critical thinking, the reading, the math, the assets, self-esteem. I'm trying to do all of these things and at some point I still have to teach biology. Come walk with me for a while.

*Local control.* Two different recommendations were made from the participants regarding local control. Some teachers appreciated the opportunity for local control. Other educators felt it was not an efficient use of time and resources.

Those in favor of local control wanted districts to still have some flexibility in deciding goals and action plans. Participants acknowledge the need to be accountable for student achievement, but still wanted flexibility. An administrator expressed concern for not changing the mandates. Even though the mandates did not necessarily sit well with everyone, they were law and the district would make it work. She stated, "I hope they don't decide to throw it out. There are changes that need to be made, but when we jump from new thing to new thing, people dig their heels in. We've got to prevent that from happening."

On the contrary, educators voiced the opinion to save time and money by mandating state standards and assessments. One teacher expressed in this way:

I think you wasted taxpayers dollars when we are all trying to do the same thing. Pool the resources together and say 'this is the way we're all going to do it.' We

can work a heck of a lot smarter, and not quite as hard. I don't believe that there is individual autonomy--especially when you are talking about benchmarks.

Another teacher agreed, "If they want to have benchmarks, then let's make state benchmarks. Stop wasting time with all this junk. And if they want to get the most out of their dollar, have a state-wide assessment." An administrator hesitantly added:

It might be nice to have state standards and benchmarks and for somebody to say 'Okay, here's the test!' There has been a lot of time throughout the whole state of Iowa spent developing standards and benchmarks. If somebody had told us, 'these are your standards and benchmarks' maybe the time could have been spent some other way.

#### District C Context

The metropolitan area that included District C declined in population between 1980 and 1990 but had regained and even surpassed its previous population by 2000. Located in the heart of the country, the community had a prime location in which to attract new businesses.

The community expressed great pride for its role in history, pride for its natural beauty and pride for its strong and varied economy. The area served as an important career center to many businesses, which included: finance, health care, retail, trade, transportation, and tourism. At one time, one-quarter of the city's population was supported by the railroad, and the city was ranked as the fifth largest railroad center in the nation. At the time of this study, the gaming industry was the largest employer in the area while the health care industry was the second largest employer. A combination of

insurance, telecommunications, agriculture, and manufacturing industries created a diverse employment base.

As a growing community with a median age in the mid-30s, the schools have received great support from the Chamber of Commerce and other partnerships. The District's belief statements described the school/community partnerships to facilitate life-long learning and meet the needs of the whole child. The schools and students have benefited from the community-supported sales-tax option as well as gaming revenue.

The community was proud of its progressive and achievement-oriented schools. Other Iowa districts have used District C as a model because of its work with assessments and its ability to capture student data electronically. The schools have reported achievement data to the community for many years.

The dropout rate for District C was higher than the state's average of 1.85%. The district invested in a dropout coordinator to track those students thought to be dropouts. Approximately 80% of the graduating seniors planned to pursue a form of post-secondary training with the majority of those being 4-year institutions or community colleges. The high school students in District C taking the American College Test (ACT) averaged below the state composite score of 22.0. Nearly 60% of the students taking the ACT scored 20 or higher on the reading and science portions of the test.

District C includes multiple high schools. Almost 75% of the students at the particular high school that was part of this study were proficient in reading, math, and science on the Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED). Across the district, the percentage of 11<sup>th</sup> graders proficient in reading and math dropped slightly. On average,

the 11<sup>th</sup> graders performed at the 60<sup>th</sup> national percentile rank and the 40<sup>th</sup> state percentile rank.

The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch was higher in District C when compared to the rest of the state. However, at the high school in this study less than 19% of the students were reported as eligible for free or reduced price lunch, which was lower than the state average.

Even though the district's overall enrollment declined, the high school's enrollment increased by over 35%. Minority population at the building increased over 200% in that same 10-year span, however, there were still less than 5% minorities at the high school.

In total, District C employed over 750 certified teachers and administrators 50% of whom had a Master's Degree or greater.

### District C Findings

Several themes emerged from the interviews regarding school improvement at District C. The activities of District C prior to House File 2272 will be described as well as the perceived purpose of 2272 and the perceived impact of 2272 on the district. In addition, descriptions of the perceived barriers will be included. District C findings' section will conclude with the educators' recommendations to the legislators.

#### *Prior to House File 2272*

District C had implemented the school improvement model several years prior to House File 2272. When the law was enacted, it was not a big shock to the teachers or administrators because they had so much in place already. There was a sense that the

district was always progressive. This section will describe the district's actions prior to House File 2272, including being proactive, the school improvement model, and standards and outcomes.

*Proactive.* "Proactive" was a term commonly used by teachers and administrators to describe the district. A teacher described that, "Our district does a much better job of being proactive. They try interventions and do things beforehand." Another teacher stated, "I can tell you they've been talking about this since 1990. We've been talking about this for so long. When it finally came as a law, it wasn't a surprise." An administrator commented that:

It takes a long time to get an organization moving, but as for the school improvement model and the use of data, the action planning, and the focus on student achievement, those were all directions we were already leaning. We try to be proactive.

Another administrator described the district's activity by stating, "When you talk about before 'House File' and after 'House File,' I'm not sure I can say 'whew' here's the moment when House File 2272 happened. We were already doing some of those things."

*School improvement model.* Several of the teachers and administrators interviewed had been with the district for many years. For them, the school improvement model had become second nature and they had been growing with it for quite awhile. Many of the teachers had experience at multiple sites within the district. They recalled various activities related to their building improvement teams from years ago. A teacher

stated, “We had building improvement plans as part of school improvement efforts for years.” A district administrator noted that:

The school improvement model that is in the legislation is best practice, which is what we already had in place. We aren’t doing it because they said we had to do it. They certainly didn’t adopt it because we had it. All in all, this system was in place.

*Standards and outcomes.* The participants shared that the district was already connecting the school improvement model with the curriculum objectives prior to House File 2272. The district embarked on a major revision in 1994 of the curriculum objectives to make them more suitable for benchmarks. As one administrator noted, “We might have called them something different, but we were certainly moving towards an alignment of that.”

The objectives and benchmarks became part of the graduation requirements as broad standards and content standards. In addition to the completion of 48 credits and required courses, the students must complete exit outcomes in six standards areas through classroom performance-based assessment tasks. At the time of this study, the first class had graduated that was required to have the exit outcomes.

#### *Purpose of House File 2272*

The participants believed that the primary purpose of House File 2272 was to hold the schools accountable for student achievement. A less evident purpose, but one nevertheless implicitly voiced, was a need for fiscal accountability. Even though schools were already doing some goal setting and monitoring those goals, the purpose of this

legislation was for school improvement and more formal accountability, by the numbers. A teacher stated, “I think they felt like schools weren’t doing a good enough job of educating kids.”

*Accountable.* The general feeling from the interviewees was that the schools were being held accountable for student achievement. One teacher expressed that as a society, “There has been a trend to ‘show me what you’ve done.’ The public wants to know how we are doing, where we are at, how we are doing compared to my neighbor, the nearby district and across the state.” Another teacher stated that it was to show the public and validate that students were getting what they were told they were getting. She exclaimed, “You’re telling me my kids getting an education. Well, show me.” A different teacher went on to say, “The community likes numbers. They want some hard core simple data to show here’s where we are.”

An administrator commented that legislators were constantly getting demands for more resources. According to the administrator, the legislators finally said, “‘There’s going to be some accountability here.’ They created a system for reporting student achievement in order to be more accountable to public.” A teacher believed the legislators questioned whether they were getting a “bang for the buck.” She stated, “In every part of society people want to know they are getting what they paid for.”

*Student achievement.* Student achievement and accountability were linked in the legislation. There was agreement from the participants that House File 2272 was intended to improve student performance. “Iowa’s model was set up to encourage improvement and that’s the right thing. They had the right intent and the right spirit,” stated one



administrator. Another administrator approved, “I 100% agree that student achievement has got to go up. That’s our most important business.”

In regards to the improvement process an administrator noted, “They sincerely wanted to change the process more to one of output. You will be accredited and judged as okay depending on how well your students achieve and how well you did at the end of the line.” A teacher commented, “Student achievement is going to be recorded, reported, monitored, analyzed, improved in whatever way we can.” A different teacher rhetorically asked, “What is a good school system? The terms that have been used are successful school and a school in need of improvement. The terms speak for themselves: results.”

#### *Impact of House File 2272*

The participants described the impact of the legislation on the district and the school improvement process. Participants believed the legislation confirmed the prior actions of the district and provided focus to their plans. The legislation caused them to address data differently.

*Confirmation.* Those interviewed agreed that the legislation legitimized the activities of the school prior to the law. A teacher stated, “It re-emphasized the importance of the district’s mission and goal for performance-based assessment and the importance of a strategy that we had already implemented.” One administrator stated, “It was a good piece of legislation for us. Now we had some legitimacy coming from higher up, saying ‘yes, we agree that this is the best practice and now everybody shall be doing it.’” He found it beneficial to have the reassurance of the law behind a decision to

implement a change and be able to do something. As a different administrator noted, “This way everybody’s doing it. You can blame us, but the job will get done.”

*Focus.* The school was much different in terms of its focus and goals. The legislation gave them common goals and narrowed the scope. A teacher affirmed the focus, “We started some of these things in different ways in different buildings. Now we are more aligned with other buildings. The target is student achievement rather than for example, drug use.” As one administrator stated, “The school became focused on specific goals, benchmarks, standards of performance per student, and monitoring, teaching, and recording those.”

When establishing district goals, the board of education became focused and specified only student learning goals. The district no longer had goals about hiring or passing a bond issue. The district strategic goals related to reading, academic skills, and post-secondary plans. Another administrator commented that, “It helps as a leader to keep the school more on focus with student achievement. I’ve even started to see a shift on things we get from the district; it’s more focused on student achievement and learning.”

*Data.* The legislation also impacted the way the school collects, analyzes, and manages data. An administrator commented that data was not simply collected and filed. He stated, “It’s not going into a dark hole. It started coming back to the door with a reminder that says it has to be better. So that is different.” One of the teachers described the change:

The biggest change I’ve seen is that we use the information from our standardized tests more. We go back and spend more time studying that information and trying

to see what it is telling us. We used to get the information back and talk about it, but didn't go into the detail that we have recently.

Another teacher described the impact that data collection had on the building.

"Good things are happening, yet some data might not look like that. So then you have to look at the data a little more carefully, in a different way. I think that's one positive, we do get feedback about our growth."

An administrator described the change from focusing on process to focusing on data and student achievement. She stated that:

This is a big model shift for Iowa schools, schools in the nation, and many teachers. The emphasis had always been on process. By shifting that around and exposing student data to the citizenry, folks are focusing on it. I think their hope was that that was a better way to get improvement.

### *Barriers*

Participants openly discussed the barriers to the implementation process. This segment will describe the six perceived barriers: buy-in, leadership, staff development, change in the classroom, autonomy, and time.

*Buy-in.* Interviewees expressed in a variety of ways that staff buy-in was a barrier to school improvement efforts. The teachers of elective courses do not see the connection to the building goals. One teacher described, "We had as a building goal to place a greater emphasis on writing. Writing was expected of everyone. There were some that didn't feel it was their responsibility." Another teacher joked, "When they announce

scores with the science and math, I'd smile and say, 'I'm doing well. My typing scores are fine!'" An administrator described that:

The challenge is getting staff members, especially in a high school, to really see where they fit into all of this. It becomes difficult to figure out how to help them feel some responsibility and accountability, to feel like they can make a difference with this, and to see where their real tie in this is.

The effort to gain staff buy-in had taken some time. A different administrator stated, "It finally dawned on people that this was for real. Iowa wasn't going to be Texas. We have local plans and they are the ones for which we are accountable. That's something we've begun to overcome."

The school also struggled with student buy-in. A teacher stated that standardized tests were not as important to students as they were to the educators. Another teacher commented that

The group you can show the most growth in right now finds it tough to see the importance. It's a longer-term goal for them as individuals. They're more in tune to short-term goals. We're still looking at different ways of how we can arrange testing situations that might be more favorable.

*Leadership.* One of the barriers to the implementation process was the staff development offered to the leaders of the buildings. The district leaders were not negative on the leadership skills of the building principals, however, as one district level leader described,

You have to have effective leadership in every building. We have to pay special attention to the staff development of our administrators and meet those needs.

That was something we didn't do. We left the principals out of the loop. We figured they would jump in and catch on.

A different administrator commented that it created a problem when the building leadership did not have knowledge to support the initiatives.

The alignment of the supervision of building leaders was also a challenge. A district-level leader expressed, "We have all the responsibility for school improvement, but we don't have the authority with which to do it. We don't have any supervision over the principals. That's a little bit of lack of alignment."

*Staff development.* Staff development was another barrier to the implementation process. The general feeling from the participants was that it was a bit of a one shot thing, without much follow up. The participants perceived a problem with continuity throughout the district. A teacher stated, "We've gone through a lot of stages here with staff development going from district staff development to building staff development and I think that's been our biggest lack of support." A district-level administrator acknowledged the concerns and stated, "We didn't have enough time and we knew we weren't doing it right. All we could do was a one-shot thing, maybe four times a year at best, very little follow through."

At the time of this study, a district-wide plan was established to expand the staff development to once a week for an hour and a half. An administrator commented, "We will not change what's happening in the classroom until we have staff development that's based on the right things."

A teacher noted, "We moved closer to strategies that we can verify that do have an impact on instruction. In-services have switched over to incorporating specific

strategies and interventions that are effective instructional strategies.” An administrator stated:

We knew that [staff development] was a piece that was not aligned and that was going to hurt us. Because the other piece which is the most obvious, the most credible, at the end of the road is change in the classroom.

*Change in the classroom.* The participants agreed that they would not get change in student achievement until they changed what was happening in the classroom. An administrator stated, “Change was very difficult. It involves changing a whole system of norms, changing a life-long pattern of instruction. People taught, not only how they’ve been teaching for 20 years, but they taught how they were taught in the classroom.” A building principal was frustrated when he asked the question:

How do you change teacher behaviors? I asked a teacher, ‘What kind of pre-reading strategies are you using?’ She looked at me with this look in her eyes, like ‘Oh, my gosh! We just worked on that, and I don’t have one!’ It never gets to the unconscious level of strategies that they use without a whole lot of thought.

Change in the classroom required staff members to buy-in and implement the research-based strategies. An administrator described the implementation efforts:

We’ve never collected implementation data in this district until [recently]. But that was the key. That was the key to getting change in the classroom. You’ve got to get at least 75% or more of your teachers implementing one of these research-based strategies and doing it correctly. Nothing is going to happen--half the teachers can’t pull the whole load. You’ve got to have pretty much everybody on board.

*Autonomy.* Teacher autonomy was described as a barrier to implementation process. The intrusion into the private sanctum was a challenge, as one teacher exclaimed, “What I do in my classroom is totally up to me.” But in general, teachers and administrators sensed a loss of control. A teacher lamented, “It used to be the only thing we couldn’t control was budget, now we’re being told what to do with our curriculum and with our results.” A different teacher stated, “Perhaps one of the glitches in the process, is the fact that we have had so much freedom in the state of Iowa.” Another educator noted:

The norm of autonomy has been a part of American education and particularly in secondary education. Teachers are not used to working together or exposing their methodology, and their student work. The process becomes much more public, so you lose some of the autonomy.

Not all teachers were totally against the loss of autonomy. As one teacher examined the pros and cons she stated, “If we were looking for ways to make it easier that would be one way if we were all doing it the same.”

*Time.* All of the participants agreed that time was a barrier to the implementation process. Teachers and administrators felt that they did not have enough time to implement all the things that the state mandated. The amount of time necessary to establish a plan and implement the plan was underestimated. A teacher described that, “You spend time targeting what it is, choosing the goal and identifying strategies and interventions to reach that goal.” Another teacher continued, “Time is always one of the factors that gets brought up. ‘When am I going have to time for this?’ It takes some time

to think, time to process and time to present the material.” An administrator concurred and added, “And do it yesterday.”

### *Recommendations*

Participants shared recommendations for the legislators. The educators described four main recommendations that will be reviewed in the following section. The recommendations emerging from the interviews included assessment, look and listen, support, and expectations.

*Assessment.* The interviewees expressed concern for the amount of time and resources consumed by standardized tests. A teacher commented, “The legislators need to realize schools are spending a lot of our time and resources on information, basically. Information that is for them and not necessarily for educating the children.”

The school spent years developing performance tasks to assess the students. One teacher felt the legislation diverted their efforts. She stated, “On the one hand, they say they want outcome based education or exit outcomes. Okay, that philosophy doesn’t correlate completely with standardized testing.”

An administrator questioned the legislators’ understanding of norm-referenced assessments. He stated, “I don’t know if they really understand the numbers part of it. We are setting the goals and moving the kids. We’re talking about something that is standardized and norm-referenced. I don’t think they understand that.”

*Look and listen.* The educators want the legislators to continue to listen to the people. One teacher wanted to thank the legislators for being progressive and looking at different ideas. She appreciated that the legislature did not simply follow what was



mandated by the federal government and looked for other ways to solve problems. An administrator expressed that legislators should “continue to listen to school districts of all sizes and to keep things in perspective as far what schools are doing well.”

A teacher invited the legislators to visit her school. She stated, “Get into the schools and look at them. Visit with the students and the teachers. It doesn’t have to be in a formal setting--pop in.”

*Support.* The participants stated a need for more support in all areas, including schools, Area Education Agencies, and the Department of Education. An administrator advised, “You’ve got to figure out some way to support us. Use the funding for concentrated training and support programs to improve teachers and their skills. If there’s a recommendation, it is to keep the support in line with your expectations.” A different administrator requested support for the Department of Education. He stated, “The poor DE is so decimated now. They need to provide minimal support to the Iowa Department of Education.” The requests for support included the Area Education Agencies, as well.

In regards to funding, a teacher stated, “Legislation is easy to pass. They should be just as willing to pass the resources that go along with that. Don’t pass legislation without funding.”

*Expectations.* Generally, the educators did not believe the lawmakers understood how complex educational change was. One educator stated that:

I think they thought it was just a matter of sucking it up and working harder. They literally didn’t have any idea of the complexity of having to learn to be successful

in a new society. At the same time, we're trying to raise all the kids to a level that we only used to raise 20% of the kids.

One administrator advised, "The recommendation I would have for them is to keep themselves informed as to what are appropriate educational expectations." Another educator noted, "Continue to track achievement, but understand there are always stories behind the numbers. Do not over simplify what you can interpret from one number."

### Cross-Site Summary and Discussion

This section will include cross-site descriptions for the emerging themes in this study. Findings will be presented by the major themes concerning the implementation of HF 2272 that were common among the schools: active schools, role of leadership, purpose of the legislation, impact, barriers, and recommendations. Discussion will follow each theme with related literature.

#### *Active Schools*

As active schools, all three schools were involved in school improvement prior to the 1998 legislation. The schools were engaged in work that addressed the students' essential learnings and fundamental educational experiences. The schools were ahead of the mandate in their efforts to define what each student should know and be able to do.

It was not surprising, therefore, that these schools were named as active schools for as Elmore (2002) stated, "the best predictor of how a school would respond to state policy was its organizational culture when the policy became effective" (p. 19). The educational leaders in these schools had been engaged in activities for school

improvement prior to 1998 and had developed cultures of expectancy that they would be proactive in improving their schools.

Fuhrman et al. (1988) found that the ease of compliance to educational reforms had a number of roots. The three schools in this study were similar to those discussed by Fuhrman et al. in that many of the new requirements were already met by the schools because the requirements matched district goals and priorities such that curriculum directors and building administrators saw opportunities in the legislation to accomplish what they had intended to accomplish anyway. The mandate from the state was simply an added incentive or, in some cases, an added instrument to force change in the schools.

### *Role of Leadership*

The curriculum directors were key people in the schools' ability to engage in school improvement. As Astuto and Clark (1986) noted, these individuals may be key actors in their districts, but their actions were dependent upon other aspects of the organization. They made every effort to do their job well and engaged in networks across districts, and within and across Area Education Agencies. These informal networks allowed them to support one another and serve as a sounding board for innovative ideas. In addition, as McLaughlin (1987) noted, "Change is ultimately a problem of the smallest unit" (p. 174). These professionals were the units responsible for responding to the legislation on behalf of their districts and interpreting the legislation at the school and even the classroom level.

### *Purpose of the Legislation*

The participants from the schools responded to the purpose of House File 2272. They perceived the purpose in three ways: (a) student achievement accountability, (b) response to federal pressure, and (c) taxpayer accountability.

The educators from all three districts identified that the purpose House File 2272 (Accountability for Student Learning Act) centered right on holding the districts accountable for increased student achievement. There was the perception among the educators that the legislature was looking for the schools to take action against declining standardized test scores. Many educators saw value in education reform, even though the thrust for accountability came from the outside.

Massell (1998) offered an intended purpose of the reform, “A key assumption of the reform strategy employed by policymakers today is that performance information. . . will drive change. . .because it is embedded in a system of rewards and sanctions that will further motivate teachers and schools to improve” (p. 32). The teachers believed that the legislators agreed with Massell in that if they established standards and high expectations for student achievement that that would trigger a response from the schools. The school’s response in turn would cause the community to be on alert for improved achievement.

Educators from the three districts also believed the legislators wanted the communities to be able to make comparisons among schools in the belief that such comparisons would prompt change where needed and in any case was justified from a public policy perspective. In their discussion of educational reform, Cohen and Hill (2001) stated as much: “the public deserves to know how efforts to change the schools affect teaching, learning, and children’s well-being” (p. 189).

The majority of those interviewed also believed the intent of the law was to remain compliant to the federal legislation. In order to avoid losing federal funding, the state had to take action toward student achievement. House File 2272 was one way to appease the federal government and still have some local control of standards. Fuhrman et al. (1988) described a reform model that involved mutual adaptations between districts and the state whereby each adjusted its goals to find a satisfactory accommodation. The perceptions of those in this study indicated that the mutual adaptations were between the state and the federal government.

Close to half of the budget for the State of Iowa was allocated for education. Especially given this large share of state revenue, Iowa educators interviewed for this study perceived they were being held accountable to the taxpayers for spending on education. Even more, according to many educators, the apparent primary purpose of the legislation was to demonstrate to the taxpayers that they were getting what they paid for. Fuhrman et al. (1988) regarded this as an expected outgrowth of additional spending for educational reforms or actions which “can be interpreted as natural impulses to ensure accountability for the very larger state aid dollar” (p. 207). In order to better serve the public, the purpose of the standards-based reform was to enhance the competence of the students and the productivity of the future workers in order to enrich the political and economic life of the larger community (Labaree, 2000).

### *Impact of House File 2272*

The participants in this study were asked to respond to the impact of House File 2272 on their district and school. What they noticed most poignantly was an increased

focus on student achievement in the schools' goals, data collection, data analysis, and staff development plans.

The legislation prompted all three schools to become more focused in their school improvement efforts. Interviewees reported that building goals became more focused on student achievement rather than climate issues. Fuhrman et al. (1988) suggested that as diffuse goals are difficult to measure, successful implementation of state policy would be enhanced if the reforms and goals were clear and coherent. With the focus on measurement of student achievement in the core subject areas of reading, math and then later, science, building goals were indeed more accurately assessed.

The participants agreed with Sirotnik (2002) who discussed the narrowing of what gets emphasized and how it gets emphasized with test-driven accountability. "Only the subjects tested—and only in the limited ways in which these subjects are tested—receive the bulk of attention" (p. 665). As such, teachers of the elective classes did not feel they were a part of the school improvement efforts. Riley cautioned against reducing the effort to one test, "If we are so consumed with making sure students pass a multiple-choice test that we throw out the arts and civics then we will be going backwards instead of forward" (cited in Shrag, 2000, p. 21).

Data collection and data analysis became more prevalent in all the schools. In-service time was utilized to analyze and disseminate student achievement data to the classroom teachers. The districts used one strategy described by Massell (2001, p. 152) in that they provided, "Data analysis training to a select group of individuals who then become resident experts in their districts or schools." Information management systems were established to make data and reports readily accessible to the teachers and

administrators for planning purposes. The schools put to use the theory of action described by DeBray et al. (2001), in that “the accountability system will provide feedback on school performance that will then be used in school improvement planning” (p. 187).

Participants in this study thought that staff development efforts had become more focused on research-based strategies that impacted student achievement. If so, this augurs well for successful implementation of House File 2272 as Cohen and Hill (2001) found that educational reform works, but only when teachers had significant opportunities to learn. Even more specifically, the schools’ educational leaders felt that the staff development had to address instructional strategies, again in agreement with Cohen and Hill (2001) who found that to be effective, policy needs to change teacher practice. “Instructional interventions must change what teachers do in the classroom”(Cohen & Hill, p. 145). Swanson and Stevenson (2002) also found that standards-based practices were more prevalent in schools that have higher levels of instructional spending (p. 12).

In this study of some of Iowa’s largest high schools, curriculum and instruction became better aligned with the districts’ belief statements and validations or essential learnings. The schools engaged in mapping activities to better align the written curriculum with the taught curriculum. However, as Bay et al. (1999) warned, making major curricular change is hard work. Efforts were made to better align assessments with the taught curriculum, as well. According to Fuhrman (2001, p. 8), accountability systems assume curriculum, assessment, teacher preparation, and professional development all aligned. If policy, standards and performance expectations do not align, then improvement will not occur.

### *Barriers*

The educators described four main barriers that surfaced as part of the implementation process. They felt their implementation efforts were limited by a lack of time, insufficient buy-in, forced assessments, and increased workload.

All of the educators identified time as a significant barrier to successful implementation. There was not enough time in the day to accomplish the work. Time was needed to allow teachers to discuss their ideas, to get a deeper understanding of the expectations, and to create the new assessments. Bay et al. (1999) noted, “A critical form of administrative support was giving teachers time” (p. 504). In general, the teachers believed more work was added to their plates, nothing was taken away, and an extended calendar to provide more time was not an option.

Time was also a limiting factor when involving more stakeholders. It was a challenge to find a time that the people involved could get together to communicate and process the information. Crandal et al. (1986) stated, “Discussion itself builds commitment, in part because it represents an investment of group effort in understanding and applying the new ideas, and in part because the ideas are actually reformulated during the process” (p. 28).

Overall, the participants described the reluctance to “buy-into” the total mind-set of the state reforms as a considerable barrier, at least among certain teachers. Experienced teachers were sometimes reluctant to change, as they already found what worked and wanted to stay with those strategies. As Cohen and Hill (2001) found, teachers were wary of fundamental changes in classroom practices. They later stated, “Teacher discretion is characteristic of teaching in the United States—this autonomy



makes change very difficult” (Cohen & Hill, p. 181). It was a challenge to convince the teaching staff that House File 2272, with an emphasis on student achievement in core areas was taking their school in a sound direction. As Crandal et al. (1986) pointed out, changing educators’ way of doing business takes time, but the commitment of teachers increases as they see their students doing better.

Student buy-in was also a challenge. Timar and Kirp (1987) indicated that “Policymakers. . .overlook the fact that students go to school for a variety of reasons” (p. 312). For some students, high school was a step toward college or a career; for others, school was where their friends were. For a few students, the law simply required them to go to school. In short, there was often a distinct and clear line from what the students perceived as their reason for being in school and the significance of the multiple assessments. Educators, therefore, were concerned that they were being held accountable for student achievement and no one was holding the students accountable for giving their best efforts. Goertz (2001) commented that the accountability systems of the 1990s do hold schools accountable for student outcomes. She noted, “Student performance is cumulative. . .and a system of collective responsibility will encourage school staff to work collaboratively.” As Astuto and Clark (1986) found, the teachers would be more likely to risk change if there were shared expectations for success. All in all, the educators were not in favor of whole school repercussions when the students did not see the significance of the change. Due to a lack of student buy-in, the educators were not in favor of high stakes.

In addition to high stakes, two other concerns centered on assessments. First, educators questioned the use of the Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) as the

nearly exclusive measure of student achievement. The ITED was a norm-referenced assessment that did not represent their curricula. The schools had local control to determine standards and benchmarks, yet they felt that the ITED, though not specifically named, was in effect forced upon them as measure of student achievement. The schools' prior efforts to develop quality classroom assessments and performance tasks were left in the shadows of the ITED. Sirotnik (2002) stated that

Assessment systems are about creating and using ways to collect information on teaching and learning and about making appraisals or judgments based on that information. . . .Other than for reasons of economy and efficiency, there is little educational justification for using easily scored tests—and only those tests—to make high-stakes decisions (p. 665).

Secondly, the teachers were concerned about the amount of time the multiple assessments were taking away from classroom instruction. Several days of instruction and working with students were lost to administer, score, and report the assessments. In addition, Bay et al. (1999) found that teachers had to invest a great deal of time just to become familiar with the assessments. Sirotnik (2002, p. 665) commented on the increased testing.

No modern organization would ever use a lone indicator to judge the worth of its operation. . . .No sensible hospital director would mandate more frequent temperature-taking to cure patients. . . .Yet we find ourselves—once again—mandating more and more testing of students and expecting this practice to result in better teaching and learning.

Finally, an increased workload was a barrier cited by many educators. Several teachers and administrators feared that the increased workload would drive experienced teachers from the profession and discourage young people from going into the profession. Every year teachers perceived more was being added without sufficient resources such as time, professional development, or funding. Sirotnik (2002) remarked that evidence was emerging regarding teacher demoralization and attrition.

### *Recommendations*

The educators from the three schools consistently offered three recommendations to the legislators about how to make legislation helpful to the districts: (a) listen to those who have to implement; (b) encourage local control with flexibility; and (c) provide funding for mandates.

All of the schools encouraged the legislators to visit their buildings, teachers, and students to obtain firsthand accounts of the impact of the legislation. As Stone (2002) advised, it would have been helpful for the policymakers to stand in the shoes of the educators and ask, “How would this law impact me?” These findings concur with Fuhrman et al. (1988) “academic excellence reforms did not initiate in the education community; in fact educators and representatives of state-level education associations complained that the reforms were ‘done to’ them” (p. 203). Educators encouraged the legislators to initiate communication with the schools. Before enacting new laws, the legislators need to have a better understanding of the complexity of the education system and the realities of policy implementation. As De Soto (2000) described, the formal laws did not coincide with how things really work. The educators did not feel they were adequately involved in developing this legislation. Sirotnik (2002) believed, “An

accountability system must listen carefully to the people most involved in educational activities. . .and must seek to develop, cooperatively, viable plans of action” (p. 665).

The educators recommended that the legislators keep things in perspective as far as what schools were doing well. The active districts believed the mandate was intended for a few schools but affected many schools. Schools were forced to do the same thing regardless of their past school improvement efforts. Mitchell (1986) noted criteria for evaluating policy and asked, “Does the policy recognize the need for and appropriately support the organizational integrity of the schools” (p. 15)? Educators from these three schools would respond no.

The educators supported the legislators’ efforts to maintain local control. McDonnell (cited in Odden, 1991a) showed that policy implementation may be difficult when an initiative fundamentally challenges traditional notion of who governs schools. Iowa historically placed the authority for directing educational policy with the local school boards. Not surprisingly then, Swanson and Stevenson (2002) found that Iowa displayed very low levels of standards activity by policymakers. The schools in this study wanted less activity and more flexibility. Elmore (1980) cautioned, “If variability enhances the likelihood of program effectiveness, it is good; if it does not, it is bad” (p. 13). The schools of this study believed that variability would still support the school improvement efforts. The educators would agree with McLaughlin (1987) when she stated, “Variability is not only inevitable in social policy settings, it is desirable” (p. 176). She later added “*local variability is the rule; uniformity is the exception* [italics in original] (1998, p. 72).”

The final recommendation from educators was to fund the mandate. The educators believed that the legislators should provide the resources that support the infrastructure for the mandate. The Department of Education was short-staffed and the Area Education Agencies were over-burdened and under-prepared; thus, the implementers had to scramble to make it work. This study agrees with Cohen and Hill (2001) in that the state's influence on local schools was modest, and its technical and professional capacity to encourage and support change was meager. The participants of this study would respond "no" to Odden's question, "Do all districts and do all schools have enough money—adequate resources—to teach their students to a proficiency standard?" (Farrace, 2003, p. 26). The schools experienced just as Stone (1985) stated, that they were supposed to (a) show good results, (b) not neglect any goal, and (c) not ask for additional resources.

The educators agreed with Sirotnik (2002) when he argued for the need to hold the political system accountable for "their" part by "expecting them to 'walk their talk' by providing the necessary resources" (p. 664). Dollars alone do little to advance reform, but reform without resources is likely to run out of gas.

## Chapter 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

House File 2272 was passed in 1998 after moving very quickly through both houses of the legislature. The Accountability for Student Learning Act required the districts to establish standards and report measures of student achievement to the public and the state as part of the accountability process.

The problem of this study was fourfold: (a) to describe the prior school improvement activities of high schools charged with implementing House File 2272, (b) to describe the impact that the policy had on the schools, (c) to describe the barriers to the implementation process identified by the educators. Finally, this study also sought (d) recommendations from the educators to policymakers regarding improved policy design.

The purpose of this study was to provide policymakers and educators with data that would assist them in formulating policy that may increase the probability of moving education in Iowa closer to lasting and more meaningful change.

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What was happening in the schools/districts prior to House File 2272?
2. What were the implementers' perceptions of the intended purpose of House File 2272?
3. What impact did House File 2272 have on the schools/districts?
4. What barriers/challenges/problems presented themselves as a result of implementing House File 2272?

5. What recommendations do the implementers have for policymakers in designing policies to more effectively impact school improvement?

The schools in this study were purposefully selected to be active schools. These schools did not sit back and wait for school improvement legislation to occur. They began establishing their own district policies and improvement plans to address student achievement.

The responses from those interviewed in this study expressed that the purpose of House File 2272 was threefold: improve student achievement, comply with federal law, and be accountable to the taxpayers for funding. The schools were being held accountable to their communities and students for increased student achievement.

The law did impact the schools in a similar manner. Participants from all schools expressed an increase in their focus on achievement. Though they were aware of school climate issues, the focus of their efforts was to improve achievement in the three goals areas: reading, math, and science. As the focus on achievement became more clear, the schools became more adept at collecting and analyzing data, and using the data to make decisions. Staff development plans and activities were designed to address assessment and instructional strategies that work.

The participants of this study noted several barriers to the implementation process. On the whole, workload, assessment, time, and buy-in were the most highly noted barriers. The educators felt a great deal of work was added and nothing was taken away. The multiple assessments using a variety of formats created a huge amount of work. Time contributed to their frustrations as additional time to accomplish the work

was not available. Educators were skeptical that all this work would truly impact student achievement. Many teachers did not buy into the improvement process.

Lastly, the participants offered recommendations to the legislators about how to make legislation helpful to districts. For the most part, the participants wanted funding, local control, and to be listened to. Those interviewed in this study wanted the legislators to listen to the practitioners. It was not necessarily a matter of not being heard, they felt they were never even asked. The educators were proud of their schools and communities. They wanted the ability to maintain local control in determining the educational standards for the students. However, if there is to be a form of accountability, then the legislature needs to understand that each district is different. The legislature should respect the work of the active districts and the steps they have already taken to be accountable for increased achievement.

### Conclusions

1. If Iowa wished to maintain its reputation of first in the nation in education, then real commitment from all stakeholders to change the infrastructure was required.

Long-lasting reform will need an infrastructure for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This includes adjusting and lengthening the school calendar to provide much needed time for teaching and learning, providing funding for school improvement efforts, and enhancing professional development opportunities for teachers. All stakeholders must make a commitment to change the infrastructure for long-lasting reform to occur.

Capacity building leads to long lasting improvements. Significant change in student achievement will only come if the instructional skills of the teachers are enhanced



through professional development opportunities. Teachers must infuse research-based instructional strategies into their regular classroom instruction. In the end, change is a problem of the smallest unit—the teacher. The educators need time to properly implement the policy. Short timelines are not conducive to long-lasting reform. This mandate expected too much too fast with no additional funding.

2. Quality education does not mean doing everything the same way for all districts.

This requires flexibility in state policy. Ellis’s statement regarding the American revolution was very fitting for House File 2272: “What was politically essential for survival was ideologically at odds with what it claimed to stand for,” (2000, p. 128) namely, local control.

A blanket policy was not necessary. Support those who are willing, and mandate and assist those who are not active in continuous improvement. Individual schools should be encouraged to develop their own educational goals and action plans. Many districts were already active in school improvement—though not particularly focused on math, science, and reading. Educators encourage local flexibility and responsibility through self-assessment and goal-setting processes.

3. House File 2272 was appropriate systemic reform in that it did encourage the districts to sharpen the focus on student achievement. However, House File 2272 had unintended consequences. Too much state guidance led to processes that did not inform instruction and, therefore, did not encourage deep change at the classroom level. The focus on the core subject areas left an uneasiness among the “electives” teachers.

The schools and teachers committed a great deal of time and resources to develop multiple assessments connected to their standards and benchmarks using a variety of formats. As the standardized tests were not connected to any school's curriculum, those tests did not inform the classroom teachers regarding necessary instructional and curricular adjustments. The schools must be allowed to use the results of the district-developed assessments. Teachers were frustrated and the momentum toward school improvement quickly receded when the schools were told they could not use the district assessments because their Comprehensive School Improvement Plans were frozen.

4. Teacher leadership is key to both state-initiated mandates for improvement and locally-initiated plans for improvement. However, the two approaches are very different in addressing what is expected of teachers, and what it means to be a teacher.

An active legislature will determine which path the state will take: democratic control or professionalism. Democratic control is more constraining and tends to encourage a single model of teaching. Whereas, professionalism recognizes the specialized knowledge that educators possess and encourages autonomy to diagnose and make judgments regarding the teaching practice.

Prior to House File 2272, the schools were developing teacher leaders and developing capacity. The loss of teacher autonomy pushed the schools back a step in their efforts to enhance what it means to be a teacher.

5. Understanding how the education system actually works is key to improving it. If you have to hurry improvement, it probably won't work in the long run. Learn the

education system not only as how policy affects the system but also in terms of how the system itself works. Added requirements do not necessarily improve schools.

There will be unintended consequences, but those can be minimized if the legislature looks before it leaps. Above all, legislators must talk to the educators to obtain a better understanding of the complexity of the education system and how a new policy actually affects it.

### Implications

The following implications are not demonstrable in the findings but are the researcher's observations and reflections on what she heard in the three large high schools and the district administrators.

1. What gets measured and publicized gets public attention and becomes the meaning of a "good school."

The mandate tended to narrow the meaning of schooling as it required schools to publish by individual attendance centers progress made in attaining student achievement goals. Whatever the Des Moines Register published became the meaning of schooling, the measure that parents and community used to gauge their school's success. As repeatedly warned, this is a skewed vision of what it means to be an educated person.

2. Legislators may need to go to policy school.

A policy that attempts to develop local capacity to plan and implement self-improvement requires a different policy instrument than a policy that requires schools to comply to a mandate. Helping local districts on their goals requires a policy different from telling local districts what to do.

If the expectations are long-lasting improvements in student achievement and the enhancement of teachers' skills and competencies, then mandates are not always the answer. Precision in broad policy implementation is probably not possible when the policy called for another agency to adopt the rules related to the policy. Using vague language leaves a great deal to be interpreted by the rule-writers and the implementers. Thus, there was a gap between the espoused theory-of-action and the theory-in-use. "Policy is a blunt instrument," but an understanding of how the system works is a key to sharpening its effect.

3. If House File 2272 was an aberration, then the system will be fine; if House File 2272 was prologue to more such policy, then the energy of the system (curriculum directors, building administrators, teachers) is likely to dissipate. Schools may have their foot soldiers in the ranks, but they won't have professionals.

### Recommendations

Policymakers must learn how the education system works.

Without this knowledge, policy is not unlike shooting in the dark. You will hit something but not necessarily only the intended target. Take the time to learn more about:

1. alternative policy instruments
2. the time required to understand and implement the policy
3. support systems
4. flexibility in policy
5. cause-effect relationships (unintended consequences)

Establish an accountability system that includes all stakeholders, adults, and students.

The accountability system must include communities, district administrators, curriculum directors, building administrators, teachers, students, parents, and policymakers. As it currently stands, if teachers are responsible for student failures, then who is responsible for policy failure?

Evaluate House File 2272. Did the policy:

1. Build capacity of staff?
2. Affect resource allocation?
3. Support high-quality instruction?
4. Affect teacher quality, recruitment, and retention?
5. Produce unanticipated consequences?

Recommendations for Further Research

1. Literature suggests that enhanced professional development opportunities change classroom instruction and ultimately student achievement. Research studies of the impact of professional development programs on changes in classroom instruction would be useful to the policymakers as they make funding decisions.
2. Literature suggests that the classroom teacher is ultimately the smallest unit to affect student achievement. Research studies of the perceptions of the implementation process of the teacher quality legislation would inform researchers, educators, and policymakers of its impact on quality classroom instruction.

3. This study examines the implementation process of active schools perceived to be successful at addressing school improvement. Active schools are excellent for informing policy but they tell nothing of those schools that were struggling in implementation specifically and in moving forward in school improvement generally. A study of these schools is important to gain an accurate view of the state reform in large high schools in the state of Iowa.

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## APPENDIX



## Appendix A

**HF2272 Implementation Study**Interview Protocol

## Teacher Version

**From what you know, what are school improvement mandates (2272) intended to do.**

- How did you learn about the school improvement mandates (2272), at first and as it unfolded?
- Tell me about any ways that you think the district is really different as a result of the school improvement process.
  - How has your district's plan impacted your role as a teacher?
  - Would you say your school is more capable and willing to take on new changes in the future?

**Do you feel you had the necessary resources and skills to implement your district's goals?**

- What did your district do to help you and/or others develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed?
  - Were these pretty much in place prior to school improvement mandates or were they more a result of the mandates?
- Do you feel that your school provided the necessary resources such as time, money, expertise to implement school improvement mandates?
  - Were these pretty much in place prior to school improvement mandates or were they more a result of the mandates?
- Do you feel school improvement mandates served to "jump start" your district's reform efforts or did it supplement what you were already doing?

- Did school improvement mandates divert time and resources from other reform efforts going on in the district before they were passed?

**Share with me the process your district utilized to implement school improvement mandates.**

- What were some of the supports to the implementation process?
  - Were these pretty much in place prior to school improvement mandates or were they more a result of the mandates??
- What were some of the barriers to the implementation process?
  - Are these much the same barriers both before and after the mandates?
- What might you suggest to do differently the next time around?

**Why do you think the legislature enacted school improvement mandates?**

- What do you think they saw as the need?
- Do you think they are getting what they hoped for?
- From your experience with the school improvement process, what do you recommend to legislators about how to make legislation helpful to districts?
  - What would recommend to legislators in future implementation efforts?

**HF2272 Implementation Study**Interview Protocol

## Administrator Version

**From what you know, what was 2272 intended to do.**

- How did you learn about 2272, at first and as it unfolded?
  
- Tell me about any ways that you think the district is really different as a result of 2272.
  - How has your district's plan impacted your role as an administrator/board member?
  - Would you say your district is more capable and willing to take on new changes in the future?

**Do you feel your staff had the necessary resources and skills to implement your district's goals?**

- What did your district do to help you and/or others develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed?
  - Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?
  
- Do you feel that your school provided the necessary resources such as time, money, expertise to implement 2272?
  - Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?

- Do you feel HF2272 served to “jump start” your district’s reform efforts or did it supplement what you were already doing?
  - Did 2272 divert time and resources from other reform efforts going on in the district before it was passed?

**Share with me the process your district utilized to implement HF 2272.**

- What were some of the supports to the implementation process?
  - Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?
- What were some of the barriers to the implementation process?
  - Are these much the same barriers both before and after 2272?
- What might you suggest to do differently the next time around?

**Why do you think the legislature enacted HF 2272?**

- What do you think they saw as the need?
- Do you think they are getting what they hoped for?
- From your experience with 2272, what do you recommend to legislators about how to make legislation helpful to districts?
  - What would recommend to legislators in future implementation efforts?

## HF2272 Implementation Study

### Interview Protocol

#### Board Member Version

#### **From what you know, what was 2272 intended to do.**

- How did you learn about 2272, at first and as it unfolded?
  
- Tell me about any ways that you think the district is really different as a result of 2272.
  - How has your district's plan impacted your role as a board member? Are you more or less involved in school improvement?
  - How has it changed the work of your administrators? Your teachers?
  - Is there a greater focus on goals, benchmarks, student achievement, etc.?

#### **Do you feel your staff had the necessary resources and skills to implement your district's goals?**

- What did your district do to help your staff develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed?
  - Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?
  
- Do you feel that your school provided the necessary resources such as time, money, expertise to implement 2272?
  - Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?
  - Do you see this as a funded or unfunded mandate?
  
- Do you feel HF2272 served to "jump start" your district's reform efforts or did it supplement what you were already doing?

- Did 2272 divert time and resources from other reform efforts going on in the district before it was passed?

**Share with me the process your district utilized to implement HF 2272.**

- What were some of the supports to the implementation process?
  - Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?
- What were some of the barriers to the implementation process?
  - Are these much the same barriers both before and after 2272?
- What might you suggest to do differently the next time around?

**Why do you think the legislature enacted HF 2272?**

- What do you think they saw as the need?
- Do you think they are getting what they hoped for?
- From your experience with 2272, what do you recommend to legislators about how to make legislation helpful to districts?
  - What would you recommend to legislators in future implementation efforts?

Appendix B  
Human Subjects Review



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY,  
ANTHROPOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

March 26, 2000

Dr. Annette Liggett  
School of Education  
Drake University  
Des Moines, IA 50311

Dear Dr. Liggett:

The Human Subjects Research Review Committee has approved your proposed research project. The Committee believes your project poses minimal risks. If you have any questions or comments please do not hesitate to contact me. Best of luck with the project!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Richard King", written over the word "Sincerely,".

C. Richard King  
Assistant Professor of Anthropology and  
Chair of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee

richard.king@drake.edu

## HSRR Project Outline Form

To be completed by the Investigator:

Date Submitted: **March 10, 2001**Proposal Title: **Transforming Iowa Schools: An Inside Look at Educational Accountability Policy**Investigator: **Dr. Annette Liggett**

Telephone (515) 271-3719

Faculty advisor: (for student research): \_\_\_\_\_ Dept.

Return to: Name **Dr. Annette Liggett , Professor**

School of Education – Leadership &amp; Adult Development Department

To be completed by the Human Subjects Research Review Committee Chair:

Date received: 03/14/01

Decision:

\_\_\_\_\_ Approval, no risk

\_\_\_\_\_ Approval, minimal risk

\_\_\_\_\_ Approval, subjects at risk, but benefits outweigh risks

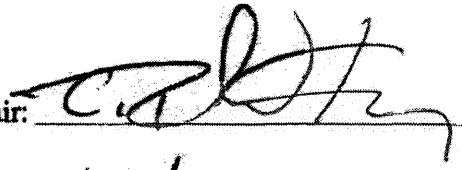
\_\_\_\_\_ No approval. Subjects at risk or proposal does not adequately address risks, benefits or procedures.

Reasons for Disapproval: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Suggested Changes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

HSRRC Chair:  \_\_\_\_\_Date: 03/26/01

Final Notification Form



HSRR Cover Sheet  
 DRAKE UNIVERSITY  
 HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH REVIEW  
 PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR'S PROJECT OUTLINE FORM

Name of Principal Investigator: **Dr. Annette Liggett**

Department: Educational Leadership

Title of Proposed Project: **Transforming Iowa Schools: An Inside Look at Educational Accountability Policy**

Proposed Starting Date: **July, 2001**

Duration: **18 Months**

Estimated Number of Human Subjects Involved in Project: **75**

I. Characteristics of Subjects (check as many boxes as appropriate)

☐ Minors ☐ Disabled ☐ University Students

☒ Adults ☐ Pregnant Women ☐ Secondary School Pupils

☐ Prisoners ☐ Legally ☐ Elementary School Incompetent Pupils

☐ Others (specify) **State level policy makers, local school district administrators and teachers who are identified by position and reputation as being knowledgeable about implementation practice of current state accountability law/policy**

II. Consent and Withdrawal Procedures, Notification of Results

A. Consent obtained from: ☒ Individual ☐ Institution ☐ Parent/Legal Guardian  
☐ Other (Specify)

B. Type of Consent: ☒ Written (attach copy of consent statement)  
☐ Oral ( attach explanation for not using written consent and attach a verbatim statement of the oral instructions to the subject.)

C. Subjects are informed of withdrawal privileges (attach copy of consent statement).

D. Subjects notified of results: ☒ Mail ☐ Individual Consultation ☐ Group Meetings

## HSRR Project Outline Form

Use additional sheets to respond to each of the remaining portions of this form.

III. Risks: Briefly describe the risks (physical, psychological, social) to the subjects, and indicate the degree of risk involved in each case.

There are no risks involved in this project to the subjects. Questions asked will be focused on knowledge of the implementation of current state law. Anonymity will be maintained in the analysis and presentation of data.

IV. Benefits: Briefly describe the benefits (physical, psychological, social) to the subjects and/or society in general.

The findings of this study are thought to be of interest to statewide educational professional organizations, the Iowa Department of Education and interested legislators, school administrators and school board members, as well as students in the Educational Leadership graduate program who are teachers and administrators in Iowa schools

## V. Methodology/Procedures

A. Briefly describe the methods used for selection of subjects/participants.

See attached proposal

B. Briefly describe all other procedures to be followed in carrying out the project.

The project is a qualitative research project with data collection done primarily through interviews. Some legislative and historical research has been done to help create the research design and interview protocol (see attached). After the interviews are completed, each will be transcribed, coded, analyzed.

C. Attach a copy of orientation information to subjects. Include questionnaires, interview questions, tests, and other similar materials.

VI. Check list. Submit three copies of the proposal you are filing. Each proposal should consist of the "HSRR Cover Form," and the "HSRR Project Outline Forms" with additional sheets and attachments as indicated (including any prospectus materials). Additionally, two copies of the "HSRR Final Notification Form" should be submitted.

VII. Agreements: By signing this form, the principal investigator agrees to the following:

- A. To conform to the policies, principles, procedures, and guidelines established by the Drake Committee on Human Subjects Research.
- B. To supply the committee with documentation of subject selection procedures and informed consent procedures.
- C. To inform the committee of any changes in procedures which involve human subjects, giving sufficient time to review such changes before they are implemented.
- D. To provide the committee with any progress reports it may request.
- E. To obtain appropriate clearance or written permission from other institutions or agencies involved in the research. Such documentation should be filed with the HSRR.
- F. The signature of the faculty advisor is required for all student research.

*Shirley M. Huggins* 3/10/11

Signature of Primary Investigator Date

Signature of Faculty Advisor Date

## Appendix C

## Interviewee Consent Form

Research Study: Transforming Iowa Schools: an Inside Look at Educational Accountability Policy

The purpose of this funded research study is to study the process of school transformation in Iowa by conducting a policy implementation study of Iowa's comprehensive school improvement and accountability mandate. In its simplest form this research project asks two questions: 1) How is Iowa's mandate for school improvement actually working? 2) How could it be redesigned to work better? A research team is interviewing approximately 120 people, including state legislators, teachers, administrators, and state and local policy makers who have been identified as the people best able to respond to these questions.

The interviews are approximately 45 minutes in length and are being conducted in 2001 and 2002. The findings of the study will be made public; however, your name and position will not be used and the data will not be reported in any way that you can be identified. Your signature indicates you understand the purpose and process of the study and that you give us permission to use the information in disseminating the results.

Please be aware that your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to decide not to participate or withdraw at any time without repercussion. If you have any questions regarding the study or participation in it, please feel free to contact us at the number listed below. Also we will be happy to share our finding from the study when it is completed.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewee Name** (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewee Position** (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewee Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Research Team:</b>	<b>Perry Johnston</b>	<b>Annette Liggett</b>	<b>Jen Lindaman</b>
	<b>Denny Wulf</b>	<b>Carole Richardson</b>	
	<b>Leslie Moore</b>	<b>Jody Ratigan</b>	

**Research Team Member Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

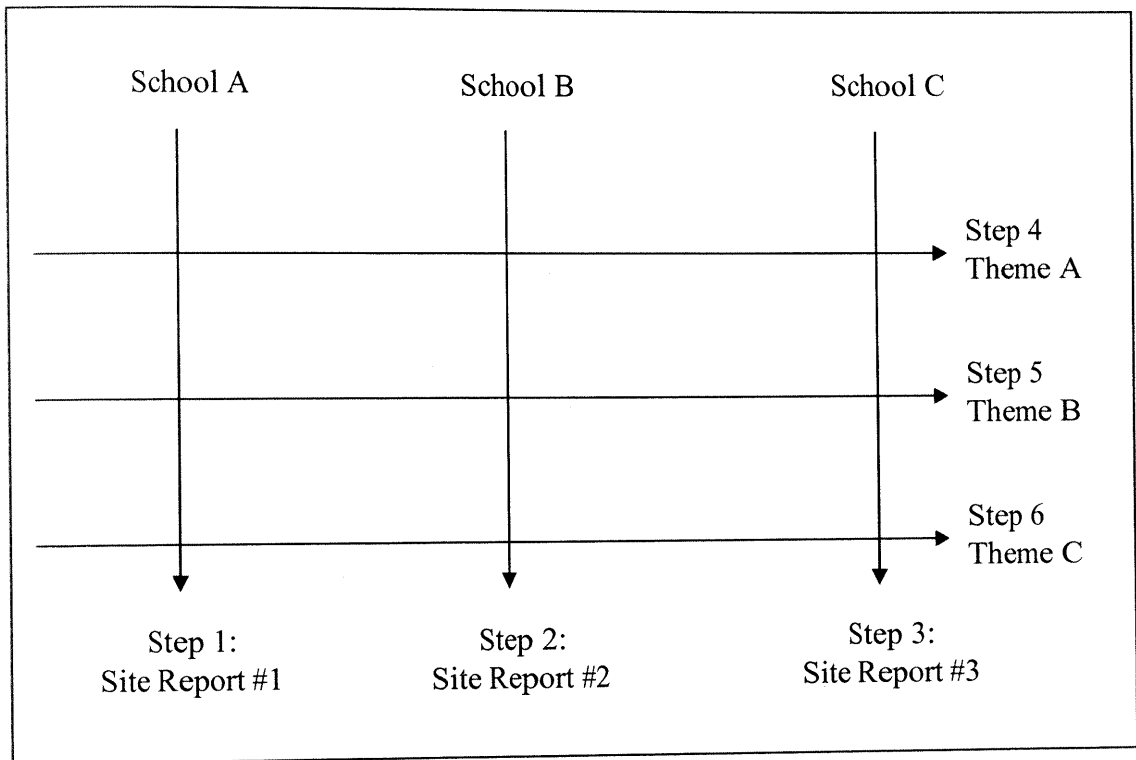
**Drake University Phone Number** (515) 271-3719

Appendix D  
Transcription Table

Line Range	Position	Speaker	Text:	District
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

## Appendix E

## Interview Data Analysis Process



	<u>District A</u>		<u>District B</u>		<u>District C</u>
<b>Prior</b>	1 Framework 2 In-Service	<b>Prior</b>	1 Action Planning Process 2 <b>School Improvement Model</b> 3 <b>Standards and Benchmarks</b>	<b>Prior</b>	1 Proactive 2 <b>School Improvement Model</b> 3 <b>Standards and Outcomes</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	1 Compliance 2 <b>Accountability</b> 3 <b>Comparisons</b> 4 Improved Schools	<b>Purpose</b>	1 <b>Student Achievement</b> 2 School Improvement 3 <b>Accountability</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	1 <b>Accountability (comparisons)</b> 2 <b>Student Achievement</b>
<b>Impact</b>	1 <b>Focus</b> 2 <b>Goals</b> 3 <b>Data</b> 4 Assessment 5 Infusion 6 Conversations 7 Initiatives	<b>Impact</b>	1 <b>Focus</b> 2 <b>Goal Setting</b> 3 Involvement	<b>Impact</b>	1 Confirmation 2 <b>Focus</b> 3 <b>Data</b>
<b>Leadership</b>	1 Visionary 2 Supportive 3 Teacher Leaders	<b>Barriers</b>	1 <b>Buy-in</b> 2 <b>Time</b> 3 <b>Assessment</b> 4 <b>Workload</b> 5 Funding	<b>Barriers</b>	1 <b>Buy-in</b> 2 Leadership 3 Staff development 4 Change in classroom 5 Autonomy 6 <b>Time</b>
<b>Barriers</b>	1 <b>Buy-in</b> <b>Teachers/students</b> 2 <b>Time</b> 3 <b>Assessment</b> 4 <b>Workload</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	1 Funding 2 Infrastructure 3 <b>Listen and Visit</b> 4 Local Control Keep Give up	<b>Recommendations</b>	1 <b>Assessment</b> 2 <b>Look and listen</b> 3 Support 4 Expectations
<b>Recommendations</b>	1 <b>Assessment</b> 2 <b>Look and Listen</b> 3 Local Control				

Created using Excel

List of Themes

Appendix F